# The Nation

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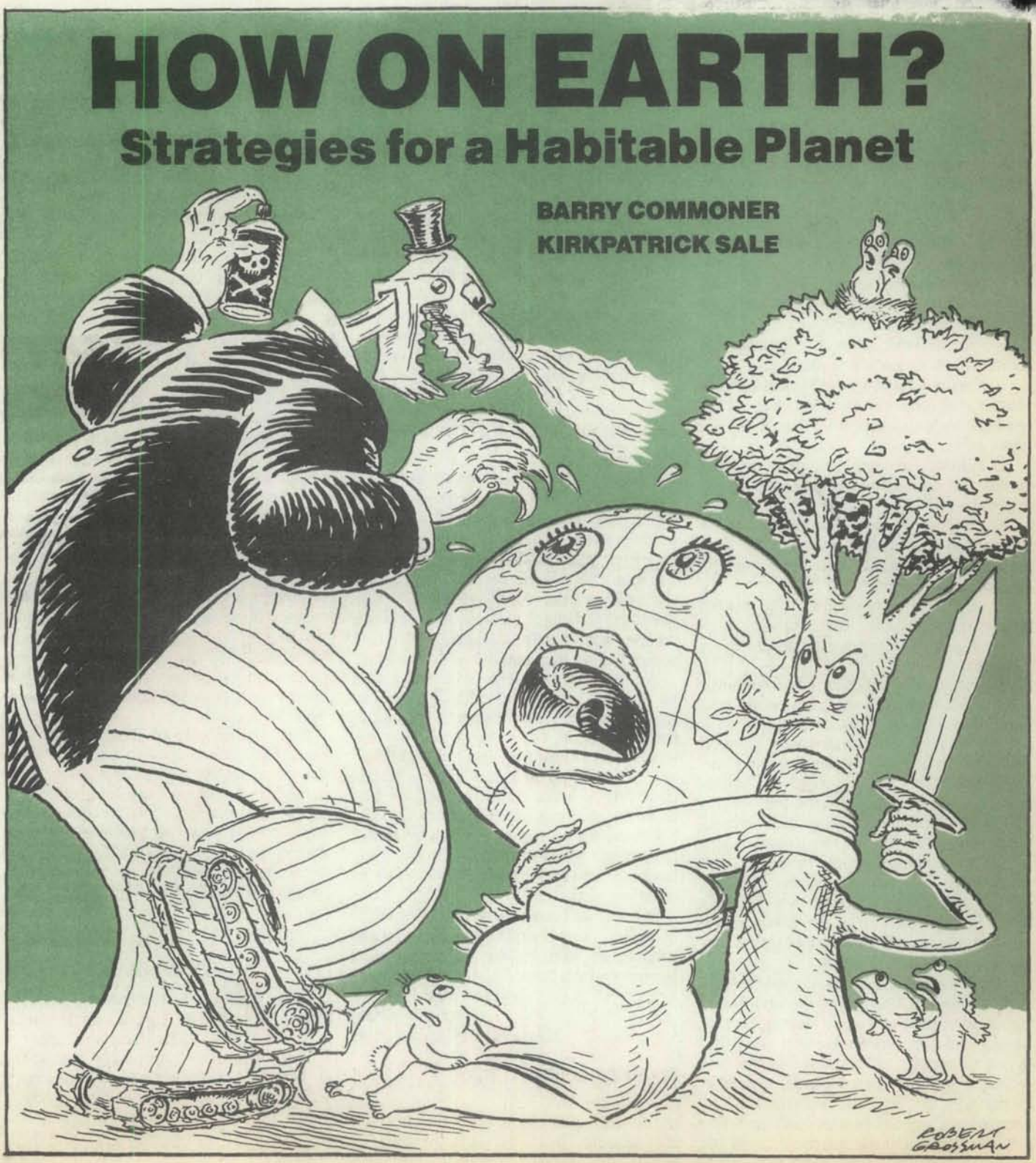



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# ERS.

## IGHT

...rical and ... that we of- ... our "union-busting skills" to these col- ...ges and universities. Actually, we offered a twelve-point plan for union prevention that included the following:

1. Maintain your credibility through truthful and frequent communications with staff.
2. Provide a feedback process with staff, so that they may react to your communications.
3. Provide competitive pay, benefits and working conditions, with special sensitivity to issues affecting the family.
4. Establish a review process that weeds out nonperformers and recognizes and rewards excellent performers.
5. Provide labor/employee relations training to the people who directly and indirectly supervise the staff.
6. Provide basic supervisory training to those who supervise the staff.
7. Create a "safety valve" grievance procedure that provides an alternative to disgruntled staff members other than an outside third party.
8. Perform frequent employee relations audits to monitor how the staff *really* perceives you. . . .
9. Conduct periodic employee attitude surveys to track staff attitudes on pay, benefits, promotions, supervision and the overall environment.
10. Establish a recognition and reward system for outstanding contributors.
11. Retain a top-notch local labor attorney.
12. Retain a competent labor/employee relations consultant who can work harmoniously with your labor attorney.

This list might also be described as "good employee relations." Without quoting my complete letter, Becker called it "union-busting." As hard as it is for the A.F.L.-C.I.O. and its minions in academia to believe, many employers do all the things on the above list and more, without being pressured by a union. Not out of altruism, certainly, but to attract labor from an ever-shrinking labor market. Seemingly, the union cannot tolerate good employee relations unless they are sponsored by the union.

Union membership in the United States is now down to 16.4 percent of the labor force, an all-time low. Yet a union won an election at Harvard and now Becker and others are trying to breathe an inordinate significance into that victory. In my opinion, the union didn't win the election; Harvard *lost* it. Simply, not enough of Harvard's common laborers, to paraphrase Becker, believed the university had their best interests at heart; Harvard's message was not credible. The union scored an underwhelming victory—by 44 votes.

I am particularly confused by Becker's lesson regarding Harvard's comportment during the campaign. On the one hand he suggests that Derek Bok violated his own principles by employing "the rhetoric of academic freedom" to justify the university's opposition. He then suggests that Harvard was ambivalent, ran an "informational campaign" and was put "in a difficult position" because "Harvard is a liberal institution," quoting Anne Taylor, who was in charge of the campaign for Harvard.

Becker seems to denigrate Harvard's attempt at a real campaign. But at the end of his article he damns Harvard with faint praise, saying that "Harvard's actions spoke volumes to other universities and non-academic corporations about *acceptable* management tactics in union elections and the place of unions in white-collar industry." [Emphasis added.]

You bet they did. Any other university that hands as many ready-made issues as Harvard did to a union and then runs its campaign the same way will lose.

*John A. Sheridan*

## ONE POINT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

*Pittsburgh*

In "Lessons of the Harvard Drive" Craig Becker stated, "to 'meet this threat,' Sheridan [John Sheridan Associates] offered its union-busting skills, honed while serving clients from Ramada Inn to Carnegie Mellon University." I assume that this information came either from John Sheridan of John Sheridan Associates or from the corporate prospectus, which lists Carnegie Mellon University among its clients.

We at Carnegie Mellon University have no recollection that either Mr. Sheridan or John Sheridan Associates was ever hired by Carnegie Mellon University to perform any kind of services for Carnegie Mellon University, was ever invited to Carnegie Mellon University to make a presentation, was ever asked for information preparatory to possibly hiring the company, or was ever invited to Carnegie Mellon University to give a lecture at the university generally or at one of its academic units.

Further, we believe there is nothing in the records of John Sheridan Associates to corroborate its assertion that Carnegie Mellon University was a client.

*Alvin P. Brannick*
*Senior Vice President*
*for Legal Affairs*
*Carnegie Mellon University*

## BECKER REPLIES

*Los Angeles*

It's a pity *The Nation* has had to lend its pages to Sheridan's shameless self-promotion. I argued that Harvard's antiunion campaign clashed with academic values; Sheridan contends that it simply was not antiunion enough. His contempt for unions is matched by contempt for universities. Here, he refers to the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s "minions in academia," and elsewhere to Harvard professor and chief negotiator John Dunlop (Gerald Ford's Secretary of Labor) as someone "generous with unions in the past," whose ground rules for negotiations at Harvard were a "Tower of Babel." Sheridan says that under president Derek Bok, a respected scholar of labor law, Harvard "*lost*" the election. By implication Sheridan, who admits being "confused" by principles of academic freedom, would have won it. University administrators ought to recognize that a union is not, as Sheridan contends, "an outside third party." But that is precisely what Sheridan's firm is, which is why it has no place in the academy.

Sheridan announces he is merely peddling "good employee relations," which employers often adopt without union pressure. But his solicitation came on the heels of the union victory at Harvard, and his twelve-point plan is, after all, for "union prevention."

As for Sheridan's credentials as a union-buster, I can say no more than the National Labor Relations Board. In the 1973 case of *G.T.E. Lenhurt, Inc.*, the board found that Sheridan's firm had instructed its client to engage in coercive interrogation and unlawful discrimination. Sheridan's consultants told supervisors to question employees concerning their union sympathies, recorded the results on index cards, created a list of pro-union employees and, in the board's words, invited supervisors to "discriminate against the pro-union employees." The board ruled that G.T.E. had committed multiple unfair labor practices, including firing pro-union employees. For these services, Sheridan's firm earned more than $300,000. But the union won the election.

Even the veracity of Sheridan's promotional brochures is open to question. Sheridan lists Carnegie Mellon as a client on its corporate prospectus, but the university disavows any connection—a revelation that sheds further light on Sheridan's dubious business practices. These are the lessons that university presidents who got Sheridan's letter along with other junk mail ought to heed.

*Craig Becker*

### AUTHOR'S QUERY

For a book on the 1898 sinking of the battleship Maine, I would appreciate receiving any letters, clippings, anecdotes and other information that relates to that disaster and the mystery surrounding it.

*Michael Parenti*
*2801 Adams Mill Rd., N.W.*
*Washington, DC 20000*

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# EDITORIALS.

## After Earth Day

*Market incentives might help clean Southern California's air.*

*The dramatic opening of Eastern Europe has offered [E.D.F. economist Daniel Dudek] unexpected opportunities. He has presented his market-based approach to environmental protection in Poland and Hungary and will go to the U.S.S.R. in June.*

*A new emphasis on pragmatism over ideology [has] opened a window of global opportunity.*

*—Environmental Defense Fund newsletter, April 1990*

On Earth Day it would do to read these statements as epitaphs on the American environmental establishment. Twenty years after the first Earth Day it is clear, as Barry Commoner reiterates in this issue, that tinkering with capitalist production in the form of government regulation has failed to improve environmental quality in this country. The corollary, as Kirkpatrick Sale suggests, is that the legions of environmental lobbyists and lawyers based in Washington negotiating those regulations—and unashamedly celebrating them on April 22—have also failed.

To succeed, environmental politics needs a movement. This is something that mainstream groups, many of them

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dependent on corporate donors and sedate in their relations with power, reject. Even Greenpeace, whose executives often claim to be building a movement, cannot get past its internal contradictions, its $22 million budget raised for the most part by poorly paid canvassers who have no say in the policies of the organization and who have been punished where they have tried to unionize.

As with most things, in the end it all comes down to class. If mainstream environmentalism is now a fixture of the elite, then who are the foot soldiers of opposition? For at least fifteen years people throughout America have been organizing locally against corporate polluters. Confronted by the practical reality of the profit ideology—poisoned drinking water, childhood cancers, dangerous beaches, foul air—middle-class housewives and husbands have begun, at least implicitly, to question the political and industrial systems that sustain it. The problem to date has been that the all-consuming task of taking on a polluter has usually meant putting larger questions to one side; also that natural allies against corporate power have too often become adversaries, as community groups developed their tactics against a company without first making common cause with their neighbors in the work force of that company.

Today it is clear that a vibrant environmentalism depends on coalition. Workers are doubly threatened by health hazards—first in the factory and second in the home. They are also doubly oppressed—first as instruments of industrial production and second as citizens in a society dominated by corporate interest. In a different way, so are the poor, whose neighborhoods often become dumping grounds or the sanctuary of companies driven out of more affluent areas. And since, as reported in a 1987 study by the United Church of Christ, the overwhelming majority of toxic waste sites in the United States are in areas heavily populated by blacks, Latinos or Indians, any environmental politics must also be a politics of economic and racial justice.

So in New Jersey tackling a chemical polluter should mean organizing with workers, arguing for reparations and retraining. In Montana preserving wilderness should mean fighting for Indians' treaty rights and religious freedom. In Hawaii saving the tropical rain forest and its unique species from a mad geothermal project should mean uniting with opponents of hyperdevelopment and supporting indigenous sovereignty claims. These are not pie-in-the-sky recommendations; indeed, throughout the country such coalitions are being explored and forged. And while they necessarily engage in local struggles, their composition and their analysis of the problem are such that they could activate a national effort distinct from the drawing-room politics pursued by the elite groups in Washington.

"Market incentives" are not the answer to environmental degradation in America; why should they be in Eastern Europe or the Third World, where economies desperate for hard currency have seen practical advantage in imports of toxic waste from the West? In Poland, according to a recent article by William Burke for *In These Times*, a government proposal to levy pollution fines, thereby creating a national fund for environmental protection, was nixed by I.M.F. and World Bank overseers of capitalist restoration. The introduction of the market system and Western chemical farming methods could mean the end for one-third of Poland's farms; nevertheless, the Ministry of Agriculture welcomes such methods, including in its foreign aid request an order for fifteen pesticides that even the E.P.A. has deemed dangerous to ground water. The group arranging their shipment from the United States is partly financed by pesticide makers Eli Lilly, Monsanto and ICI.

The most appropriate celebrations around Earth Day, therefore, will be those that go to the source of ecological calamity, provide an opportunity for political expression and offer a vision of life in harmony with nature. On April 23 protesters will shut down Wall Street. In San Francisco they will flock to the financial district. In the Pacific Northwest they will defend the last old-growth forests against clear-cutting. These represent the only forms of "pragmatism over ideology" worth fighting for.

# *Contra*goat

The guilty verdict in the trial of former National Security Adviser John Poindexter will be a warning to policy-makers that they cannot act illegally and then plead presidential prerogative. Poindexter's defense had an imperial ring: He couldn't have been in violation of the law because the President (generally) knew of and authorized his actions. Jurors rightly called that bunk.

The great myth of the Iran/*contra* scandal, which has been perpetuated by special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh's limited selection of indictees, is that Oliver North and Poindexter, with a little help from such friends as general-turned-arms-dealer Richard Secord, his partner Albert Hakim, fundraiser Carl (Spitz) Channell and C.I.A. officer Joseph Fernandez, ran a rogue operation. Now Poindexter enters the small pantheon of fall guys. He and Oliver North, in perhaps their final service to Reagan, have taken the rap, even if unwillingly, for the higher-ups. The truth is, nearly everyone was in on it.

Poindexter was convicted of lying to Congress in an attempt to hide two things: the Reagan Administration's secret support of the *contras* during the time the Boland amendment prohibited such assistance, and the November 1985 shipment of Hawk missiles to Iran. His intent was clear: to cover up politically embarrassing and apparently illegal events. When the story broke that the we-do-not-negotiate-with-terrorists Reagan White House had indeed tried to cut a deal with Iran, Poindexter did all he could to hide the shipment, including tearing up the intelligence finding that Reagan had signed after the shipment in a dubious effort to authorize the mission retroactively. But Poindexter was not the only one covering up. Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan all said that the White House did not learn of the Hawk shipment until after it had occurred. They all lied. And Reagan lied when he told the nation there had been no U.S. involvement in that weapons transfer.

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On the *contra* front, more important than the North-Secord arms-supply network were the quid pro quos the Reagan Administration used to bribe other countries to do what it could not do openly—support the *contras*. In his amnesiac video testimony for the trial, Reagan equated a quid pro quo with "breaking the law"; then he acknowledged that his Administration had made sure the Honduran government understood that "in return for our help in the form of security assurances as well as aid," it was expected to assist the *contras*. This conspiracy to skirt the Boland amendment was engaged in by all the top officials of the Administration. They preserved the secret until most of them—with the notable exception of George Bush—had left government service.

Three years after he began his inquiry, Walsh now says he will make a summation of Reagan's role in the Iran/*contra* affair for the final report he must produce. He would provide an additional public service by reporting on Bush's involvement in the quid pro quo policy and evaluating Bush's incredible claim that he alone among top Reagan officials knew practically nothing of the Iran initiative until it became public.

In the end, the limited hang-out plan seems to have worked. North and Poindexter were nailed, and all that the heavyweights of the Reagan White House have to worry about is an unflattering mention in Walsh's report.

# SuperMandela?

Ever since F.W. de Klerk announced his New South Africa, there has been more violence than at any other time since the state of emergency was imposed in 1986. The Pietermaritzburg area in Natal is a war zone; a march in the township of Sebokeng ended with police killing seventeen demonstrators; there have been uprisings in the homelands; even the dreaded "necklace" is reported to be back.

All of this has given the government and its supporters an opportunity to point the finger at the African National Congress. Gerrit Viljoen, the minister in charge of negotiations, declared that "certain elements pretend to be keen on participation in negotiating the reform process but . . . are trying to improve their situation by bringing destabilization to South Africa."

In fact, the violence is an indictment of the state of emergency, not of the liberation movement. What is striking about this latest uprising is that the demonstrators have exactly the same grievances they had in 1985 before the state of emergency: high rents, collaborationist officials, repressive police. Now that the A.N.C. has been unbanned and political expression is again legitimate, the thin skin of "normality" imposed by the emergency has been ruptured. We are witnessing a continuation of the 1985 uprising, fortified by a four-year period of incubation and the surge of expectation that came with the release of Nelson Mandela.

Much of the violence for which the A.N.C. has been blamed has occurred within the three "independent" homelands whose leaders refused to align themselves with the liberation movement—Bophuthatswana, Ciskei and Venda. (The fourth and largest, Transkei, has come out in strong support of reincorporation into a democratic South Africa.) While South Africa begins to move toward democracy, the homeland tyrants cling tenaciously to their fiefdoms. One of them, Ciskei Chief Lennox Sebe, has already been deposed by a military coup supportive of the A.N.C., and unless the South African government can influence the other two puppets to soften or abdicate, they are likely to face an imminent and bloody end.

The situation in the homeland of KwaZulu is somewhat different: While much of the fighting is simply gang warfare exacerbated by extreme poverty and masquerading as political struggle, there is no doubt that both the Zulu movement Inkatha and the United Democratic Front have stoked some fires. Even though Zulu Chief Gatsha Buthelezi calls for "a national campaign by all South Africans to eliminate the current violence," his ticket to an important place at the negotiating table depends on the erosion of Mandela's primacy, and the best way of doing that is to make sure the A.N.C. leader's attempts at peacemaking fail.

Buthelezi is not alone in seeking to undermine the A.N.C. Lucas Mangope, the leader of Bophuthatswana, will certainly continue to outlaw the organization, and the Sebokeng massacre will not be the last word from the extreme right wing of the police. The A.N.C.'s response has been to slow down the very negotiating process to which it has hitched its star. Not only did it cancel an appearance by Mandela at a proposed Inkatha peace rally; it also postponed the first round of talks with de Klerk, scheduled for April 11, citing the Sebokeng massacre.

Behind the apparent stalling, a complicated diplomatic strategy is at work. In the case of Natal, the A.N.C. has come to understand that if Mandela's reputation as black South Africa's primary negotiator rests on his ability to resolve this particular crisis, he can only lose. The situation is beyond the control of one 72-year-old man who has spent almost thirty years in jail. Similar reasoning may have prompted the A.N.C. to postpone the de Klerk talks. Its first demand at any meeting must be an end to the state of emergency. But de Klerk might refuse to grant this until the A.N.C. guarantees peace in the townships—which it cannot yet do. If this were to happen, the A.N.C. would not only lose face with its supporters but also bargaining power with the government.

The A.N.C. has been legally operative for less than three months. As it becomes entrenched as a real force rather than a mythological one, it will hold greater sway both in the townships and at the negotiating table. But that will take time, for the A.N.C. must find its place within the grassroots structures that have been established during its thirty-year exile. After his release Mandela promised that the people would be consulted on everything, and consensus is very much the rule in South African liberation politics. His talk of being a disciplined servant of the people is not empty populist rhetoric; it is his credo.

Even in the current instability, Mandela is scoring impor-

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tant political victories. At a cordial meeting on April 5, he persuaded a recalcitrant de Klerk to agree to an investigation into the Sebokeng killings. The pre-negotiation talks have been rescheduled to May 2 and extended from one day to three. Mandela is also on the verge of bringing the Black Consciousness organization Azapo into his coalition and has been able to win over a majority of homeland leaders. With five out of nine of them now at least tacitly in the A.N.C. camp, de Klerk has lost his potential bastion of black support.

"ROUND ONE TO MANDELA AND THE A.N.C.," proclaimed the liberal Johannesburg *Sunday Star*—even after the A.N.C. had withdrawn from the talks. The paper was right: Mandela has managed to buy critical time and prove to his membership that he is as principled as ever. Certainly, the current problems are shaking the superhuman myth that surrounds the A.N.C. leader. Perhaps he is, after all, a party man who refuses to rise above the will of his people. If so, more power to him.

MARK GEVISSER

*Mark Gevisser writes regularly on South Africa for* The Nation.

# UNCIVIL LIBERTIES.

CALVIN TRILLIN

Once the flap about President Bush's distaste for broccoli began to fade from the headlines, I waited quietly to be asked if I would put the matter in historical perspective. I figured that people might now want to seek out some scholar who has shown himself capable of taking the long view. So far, the phone has not rung.

When it does, I will remind those who are so quick to decide the significance of Bush's broccoli pronouncement that they would do well to study some research of my own that began in the Administration of Richard Nixon. It was during Nixon's reign that my interest in presidential food began, although I might have previously made a few passing references to the influence wielded in the Kennedy White House by what I always used to refer to as "the boeuf à la bourguignonne gang"—a group of political advisers pushing the theory that the only way an American President can enhance his public image at mealtime is by eating dishes he might have difficulty pronouncing.

Nixon, of course, did not hold with fancy French chow. He was noted for lunching at his desk on cottage cheese with ketchup on it—a dish most Americans found so bizarre that its appeal to Nixon was used by his enemies as a comment on his character. During his second term, the White House put out the word that the President had begun to eat his cottage cheese without ketchup—presumably hoping that this information would be used by Washington commentators as evidence that Nixon had, in the phrase Washington commentators have always loved, grown in the presidency. That might have happened, except for one problem: Since the information on ketchup had come from the Nixon White House in his second term, nobody believed it.

Apparently realizing this, the White House seemed to be trying to distract the press from the ketchup-on-cottage-cheese issue by revealing favorite recipes of various members of the First Family. Tricia Nixon's favorite recipe, for instance, was called Chicken Divan, and it involved pouring two cans of cream of chicken soup on some poor bird that was already a chicken.

I suppose you could say that Chicken Divan distracted the press for a while. I'm sure some White House reporters tried to figure out whether the name indicated that Chicken Divan is often eaten while sitting on a divan or tastes very much like what you'd imagine a divan might taste like. I suppose you could argue that Pat Nixon's favorite recipe—which turned out to be something that was called Continental Salad and had as its active ingredient canned beets, canned grapefruit juice and Jell-O—also took the press's attention off ketchup for a while. Reporters must have spent some time arguing among themselves about which continent Mrs. Nixon could have had in mind. But the ketchup-on-cottage-cheese issue never truly left. At press conferences in the Watergate days, Nixon would stand up there declaring his innocence and some White House reporters would be carefully inspecting his necktie for tiny red stains.

After Watergate, we seemed to have a succession of one-dish Presidents. Gerald Ford was known for tamales (eaten while still in their corn-husk wrapping), Jimmy Carter was known for grits, Ronald Reagan was known for jellybeans. Most of these dishes became popular for a couple of months and were then forgotten. There must be thousands of American households, for instance, that still have an open and largely unused box of grits dating from the early years of the Carter Administration. (A helpful hint to them: Grits may be used as a substitute in any recipe that calls for wood putty.)

The single serious policy decision from the White House concerning eating came when the Reagan Administration, while looking for ways to cut the federal school lunch program, decided that ketchup qualifies as a vegetable. Commentators wrote that the Administration had stupidly provided its opponents with a symbol of its inclination to be much more moved by the plight of overtaxed industrialists than by the plight of underfed schoolchildren. Only now does it become clear that the school lunch decision, then considered a public relations disaster, may have reflected some shrewd strategic planning: The Reagan Administration's policy on ketchup may have been the beginning of the public rehabilitation of Richard Nixon.

Nixon is now welcome back in Washington. He is called an elder statesman. Nobody looks for tiny red stains on his neckties. In these days of healthy eating, he can be described as a President who, while in the White House, often had a light lunch of cottage cheese and vegetables. Sometimes, it's necessary to take the long view.

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# Theology (PART II)

EDWARD SOREL

THE NEW INFERNO
THOSE WHO WERE NEVER BAPTIZED
THOSE WHO COMMITTED ADULTERY
MURDERERS, RAPISTS, NON-ORDAINED PEDERASTS, AND ANYONE WHO TOOK THOSE DAMNED PILLS FROM FRANCE.
ES

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# MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

An underclass is a handy thing. In fact, no ruling class should be without one. It scares the middle class, and it arouses the contempt of the working class. These are powerful emotions: in the former instance the fear of crime, and in the latter the traditional dislike for the indigent and the unskilled. At election time figures like Willie Horton—the products of an abandoned and demoralized stratum—can actually be run against. In the intervals the same imagery of the feral and the feckless can be mobilized, as if the inhabitants of the lower orders were just a given, to be put out of mind until or unless needed, like demons for a morality play. Margaret Thatcher did us the favor of putting this succinctly in a celebrated interview with a British women's magazine a year or so ago:

> And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families.

Over the past decade and more, this attitude as applied to the British urban landscape has had results that it would be lazy to term predictable. A staple of middle-class conversation in London these days is the astonishing discrepancy between the classes, and the ways in which this discrepancy has been intensified by the poll tax. "We've got a four-bedroom house, so we'll pay £500 less. But old Mrs. Thing—she's our cleaning lady and we'd be lost without her—well, *she's* going to be £300 *worse off*."

Let the *lumpen* elements take the law into their own hands, however, and we soon enough find out that there is such a thing as society after all. In fact, this society is so definitely constituted as to have identifiable foes—"enemies of society." Loud and furious were Thatcher's rebukes to these enemies after the poll tax riots in London on the weekend of April Fools' Day. It turned out that we all had obligations as well as rights, a social contract to uphold, a duty to stand behind the forces of decency and I don't know what else.

In the coverage of these disturbances in the American news media, I caught a distinct note of shock, as if the use of physical force were somehow axiomatically un-English. I've never understood why this illusion persists so doggedly. The British have a record of global violence second to few, and used to be celebrated throughout Europe as well as Asia and Africa for their willingness to employ deadly force. Until the present century, moreover, English social relations were extremely tempestuous, with the London mob very often used by church and king against reform, and with the great British streetfighter called upon repeatedly in battles for the right to vote, to organize, to publish unlicensed newspapers and to be rid of arbitrary taxation.

The last issue is the germane one here. The Peasants' Revolt of 1381 may have been made easier by the shortage of labor that resulted from the Black Death a generation earlier, but it was ignited by a poll tax—a tax on merely being alive and having a head to count. Later, as Grafton's *Chronicle* put it in 1568: "The people greatly murmured for the payment of foure pence the polle." In 1637, John Hampden defied the subsequently executed King Charles I over the levying of "ship money." The Establishment learned little from this, publishing in the London *Gazette* for 1689 "An Act for Raising Money by a Poll, and otherwise, towards the Reducing of Ireland." There is, in both the active and the passive repudiation of the Tories' latest impost, a social memory at work and a historical one as well.

Not all of this memory is to do with flagrant inequality and inequity. It also concerns the matter of democracy and representation. Just as poll taxes became notorious in the South as a means of keeping black Americans off the voting rolls, so the struggle against poll taxes in England has always involved questions of political justice. In the present case, Thatcher has made it plain that her real target is the autonomous local and city government system, which tends to return Labor and independent councils. The poll tax will throw the burden of revenue raising onto this hard-pressed sector and shift the responsibility for basic services and provisions. The temptation for voters will be to elect the party locally that promises the least crippling poll tax assessment, and this in turn will advance the coming of an atomized, anomic society in which private affluence and public squalor more or less necessitate each other. Those who wish to avoid the tax, as millions are already trying to do, will have to stay off the electoral register from which they and their dwellings can be identified. For them, there will indeed be hardly any such thing as society.

The recent pictures of the crowd versus the mounted police are a convenient if stark image of the "free economy/strong state" project that has been the essence of Thatcherism. After more than ten years of it, Britain has emerged as the most reactionary country in Western Europe, with the worst unemployment, the most offenses logged before the European Court of Human Rights, the largest relative expenditure on military and police forces and the second lowest capital investment rate. The situation is so dismal, in fact, that a man like Michael Heseltine, who has spent all his career in the service of what is politely called "venture capital" and who once donned a flak jacket to oversee the forcible eviction of peaceful demonstrators from a nuclear missile base, can be canvassed by apparently serious commentators as a healer and a moderate.

Thatcher is a much more durable and courageous politician than any member of her muted and neutered Cabinet, and it is always unwise to underestimate her. She does not care if she is liked so long as she is feared and respected. Nonetheless it remains possible that, in the words one hears at every hand, "The bloody woman's gone too far this time." If so, we would do well to listen to the warning offered by Tony Benn, leader of Labor's vanquished left. The danger, he cautioned a few months ago, is that the Tory party will change its leader and convince the electorate that there has been a change of government. It will take more than a shuffling of the personnel of the regime to reinstate the concept of society.

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# ARTICLES.

ECOSPHERE VS. TECHNOSPHERE

# Ending the War Against Earth

BARRY COMMONER

It is time now, twenty years after the country set out to mop up our badly polluted environment, to ask a potentially embarrassing question: What has been accomplished?

The answer is indeed embarrassing. After spending some $1 trillion in an effort to control environmental pollution, we have minimal results. For example, emissions of standard air pollution—dust, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides—have declined since 1975 by only 18 percent; since 1982 there has been no improvement at all. At nearly nine-tenths of the national river test sites water pollution has remained the same or has become worse. The ozone layer that protects the planet from damaging ultraviolet radiation is being destroyed by chemical pollutants, and the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which threatens a devastating increase in global temperature, continues to rise. The nuclear reactor explosion at Chernobyl has heightened the risk of cancer for many thousands of Europeans. The very few successes—since removing lead from gasoline, lead emissions have been reduced by 94 percent—tell us what works. The production process that generates the pollutant must be changed to eliminate it.

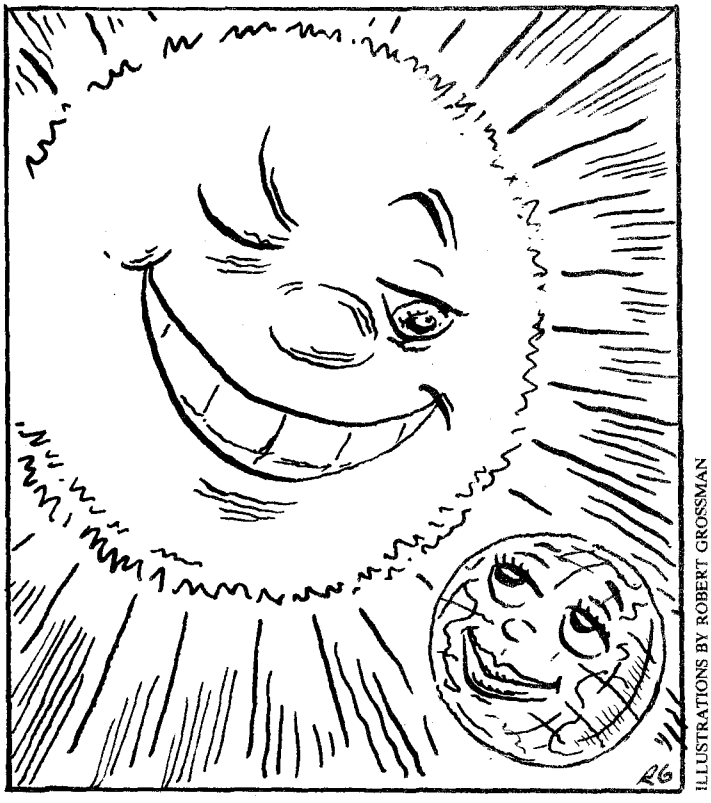
So if the war between nature and man—between the ecosphere and the technosphere—continues, what can now be done to end it?

There are those who believe that the war can end only with the technosphere defeated, although they differ on the conditions to be imposed in the treaty of peace. Some believe in a standstill treaty, satisfied if human society gives up further economic growth, and with it the continued attack on the environment. Others would exact a sterner tribute, requiring that the world population, and with it the present scale of economic activity and environmental stress, be reduced. At the edge of rationality there is the view of Earth First! that the treaty should require modern industrial society to "give way to a hunter-gatherer way of life, which is the only economy compatible with a healthy land."

Regardless of the tribute exacted by nature in such a peace treaty, it would represent a defeat—a loss of things of value—for human society, the technosphere's inventor and beneficiary. I say this in the conviction that every human life, however degraded by poverty or enhanced by wealth, has equal value; that having more than life's necessities is better than having less; that a symphony performed in an urban concert hall has a value not supplanted by the music of a lone shepherd's pipe. If it were true that we had to give up such values to end the assault on the ecosphere, then, in my judgment, the war would end with a tragic defeat for human society.

I take the view that the war between the spheres is mutually destructive: Nature is devastated, and human society suffers, not only because nature is diminished but also because the present environmentally hurtful production systems diminish the opportunities for economic growth and social development, especially in the Third World. This calls for a negotiated peace that takes into account both nature's need for self-sustenance and the human need to increase and disseminate the present material level of human welfare, and bring an end to poverty.

In less allegorical terms, the task is this: We must recognize that the assault on the environment cannot be effectively controlled but must be prevented; that prevention requires transforming the structure of the technosphere, bringing it into harmony with the ecosphere; that this requires a fundamental redesign of the major industrial, agricultural and transportation systems; that such a transformation of the systems of production conflicts with the short-term profit-maximizing goals that govern investment decisions under capitalism; and that, accordingly, politically suitable means must be developed that bring the public interest in long-term environmental quality to bear upon these decisions. Finally, because the problem is global and deeply linked to the disparity between the development of the planet's Northern



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT GROSSMAN

*Barry Commoner is the director of the Center for the Biology of Natural Systems. This article is adapted from his book,* Making Peace With the Planet, *recently published by Pantheon.*

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and Southern hemispheres, what we propose to do in the United States must be compatible with the global task of closing the economic gap between the rich North and the poor South—and indeed must facilitate it.

This task is not merely formidable but truly intimidating: in its complex interaction of technological, economic, social and political factors; in its totally unprecedented scale; in its impact on longstanding practices and deeply held convictions. But the time is ripe for attempting even so desperate a labor, not only because of its urgency but also because this is a period in which heady optimism is justified. It is justified by the sudden retreat of the threat of nuclear war and the willingness of powerful nations to re-examine—and change—their internal distribution of power, even if this is thus far chiefly limited to the Soviet Union and its allies.

**Environmentally Friendly Technology**

It is clear what actions can be taken to stanch the attack on the ecosphere at its source, in the systems of production that have been developed on a gigantic scale since World War II. These production technologies must be changed in ways that eliminate, or very greatly reduce, their creation of pollutants without hindering their ability to produce necessary goods and services. The new technosphere must be both productive and compatible with the ecosphere. Indeed, such a change should improve the long-term economic efficiency of the system of production. But all this is only logic, a set of sensible but abstract ideas. The reality is both illogical and so entrenched as to appear unalterable. Are we then condemned to an ultimately suicidal war with the planet?

A historical perspective is useful here, for it reminds us that the intrinsic structure of the technosphere, unlike that of the ecosphere, is a human creation and has been repeatedly designed and redesigned over the course of history. From the first stone tools, through primitive agriculture and crafts, to modern mass production systems, technologies and the social structures created to implement them have come and gone. The alterations that have generated the environmental crisis have been centered in time around World War II, and these testify not only to the possible scope of changes in the means of production but also to their speed. In less than forty years we created an ecological phenomenon, smog, by increasing the compression ratio, hence the nitrogen oxide emission, of the automobile engine; we produced algae-fouled lakes and seas by changing crop fertilization methods, and intractable radioactive wastes by reformulating military explosives and attempting to reorganize the electrical power industry. If those technological changes could be made in so short a time, surely new changes, comparable in magnitude, that undo their damage are possible as well. But the transformation will require a new motivation, for the old one—the maximization of short-term private profit—is itself responsible for the unfortunate link between the current technologies and their heavy impact on the environment.

The practical means of carrying out these changes are evident from the past twenty years of experience with alternative, ecologically sound technologies. In agriculture, our experience with integrated pest management to reduce sharply the use of pesticides, and with organic farming to eliminate the entire range of agricultural chemicals, is sufficient to guide the shift from conventional agriculture to organic farming, with little or no reduction in crop yield and, indeed, economic benefits to farmers. In the energy area, the forms of conservation now practiced in residences, industry and transportation need only to be extended universally. All of the solar energy technologies that can replace gaseous, liquid and solid fossil fuels are in hand; some are already economically competitive with conventional sources and many are rapidly approaching that point. The most convenient source of solar electricity, the photovoltaic cell, is already well developed. These cells are cost-effective in areas not supplied from central sources and could soon compete with central power plants if production facilities were expanded. Several technologies that can convert cars and trucks to solar fuels—ethanol and methane from biomass—exist, and solar sources of electricity can be used to drive electric-powered vehicles.

Finding alternatives to petrochemical products presents the most difficult problem. Often the substitution of one chemical for another is only a partial improvement. Less-chlorinated chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) still threaten the ozone layer, and so-called biodegradable plastics are not in fact capable of being broken down in the soil or by composting. It is important to remember, though, that nearly every petrochemical product is itself a substitute for some product made of natural materials such as wood, cotton or paper or of common materials such as metal and glass. Unique, irreplaceable petrochemical products, such as pharmaceuticals or videotape, represent only a small part of the total output. Hence, many current petrochemical products could readily be replaced by one of these older, and more ecologically sound, materials. Recycling technology is sufficiently advanced that it could convert 80 to 90 percent of the trash stream into useful materials, obviating the need for inherently hazardous incinerators. The methods for restoring natural resources such as forests and wetlands are well developed.

In sum, the technological basis is largely available for transforming present systems of production into ecologically sound ones. However, the mere existence of the required technologies is far from enough; a great deal depends on how they are used. Indeed, improperly applied, ecologically appropriate technologies can do little good and sometimes do more harm than good. It is possible, for example, to design a process for producing ethanol from agricultural crops that interferes with food production and uses more energy than it produces. Such a design has been formulated by the Mobil Oil Company. Similarly, photovoltaic cells have been used in large, centralized power stations, a deployment that destroys their major economic advantage: the elimination of the cost and energy loss involved in transmitting electricity.

Such mistakes can be avoided with proper integration of the solar device into the overall system of production. This is crucial. Thus, ethanol production can be energy efficient if its distilling equipment is properly designed, and, since ethanol is produced solely from carbohydrate and the re-

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# IS RELIGION JUST FOR THE IGNORANT?

In many intellectual circles the myth still circulates that religion is the preserve of the dim-witted and unlettered. Yet, recently *The New York Times Magazine* carried an article on the "return to religion" among intellectuals. From Harvard to Berkeley, and amid inquisitive people generally, there's an undeniable renewal of interest in the questions traditional religion raises and seeks to answer. This fascination is largely a result of the failures of secular substitutes for religion (such as rationalism, narcissism, technological utopianism, aestheticism, and extremist political ideologies) to give abidingly satisfying answers to the truly significant puzzles in life: goodness, suffering, love, death, and the meaning of it all.

By no means, however, does this religious renaissance entail embracing the ersatz gods of dog-eat-dog individualism, consumerism, or superpatriotism. Nor does it imply a retreat from working for peace, justice, or human dignity. Rather, there's an awareness that, as Jean Bethke Elshtain put it, religious commitment "can help further social reform," and that religion can supply the ethical bedrock upon which to make political choices which are far more durable than those based on passing ideologies and enthusiasms. Nor does the new openness to religion signify a hostility to science, but rather an appreciation of the limits of science and technology.

*The New York Times Magazine* article discussed the NEW OXFORD REVIEW as part of this return to religion, and rightly so. We at the NEW OXFORD REVIEW are spearheading today's intellectual engagement with what Daniel Bell terms "the sacred." We are particularly interested in exploring religious commitments that yield humane social consequences, as exemplified by such giants as St. Francis, Gandhi, Bonhoeffer, Barth, Tawney, Schumacher, Mounier, Dorothy Day, Archbishop Tutu, Lech Walesa, Martin Luther King Jr., and Archbishop Romero. And we probe the literary and philosophical riches offered by such greats as Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, Buber, Auden, Eliot, Silone, Maritain, Waugh, Merton, C.S. Lewis, Simone Weil, Flannery O'Connor, and Graham Greene.

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maining protein is regularly used to feed animals, it need not clash with food production if the crop system's carbohydrate content is increased. In the same way, photovoltaic cells can become cost-effective if they are used in local installations to drive machines, such as cooling equipment, that have a high power demand when sunlight is most available.

## The Right Remedies

Clearly, the transformation to ecologically sound systems of production will take time, and it is important to make changes within the present systems that will facilitate the introduction of the new technologies. The relation between natural gas and solar methane offers a good illustration here. Natural gas is a nonrenewable fossil fuel, largely composed of methane, that has several environmental advantages over oil or coal. When burned, it produces less air pollution from sulfur dioxide, it yields much less carbon dioxide per energy unit produced and it can effectively fuel highly efficient, decentralized cogenerators in urban areas. (A cogenerator recaptures and uses the heat that a conventional power plant expels into the environment.) Thus, environmental improvement can begin with the substitution, within the existing fossil fuel system, of natural gas for oil and coal (and nuclear power as well) in the many facilities where this is technically feasible. The investment in these methane-powered facilities and in an expanded natural gas pipeline system would in turn ease the entry of solar methane as a replacement for natural gas. Solar methane is readily produced by fermentation of sewage or manure, and from vegetable matter generally. As decentralized sources of this fuel are developed, they can be introduced into the pipeline and gradually replace the natural gas, which in this way serves as a bridging fuel. Thus, the technology needed to improve the energy and environmental efficiency of nonrenewable fossil fuel would be easily adaptable for the delivery of renewable solar energy.

It is also important to keep in mind the integrated aims of the transformation of production technologies. Generally speaking, these are: to prevent local pollution from the systems of production; to prevent the potential worldwide environmental effects (global warming and the destruction of stratospheric ozone); to accelerate ecologically sound economic development in the Third World. These goals cannot be approached piecemeal, for improperly satisfying one of them may ricochet, causing other problems. The classic example is the proposal that nuclear power plants should be greatly expanded to replace plants that burn fossil fuels.

A similar issue arises in relation to the introduction of alternative fuels—natural gas (methane), methanol and ethanol—to reduce vehicular air pollution. While the substitution of any of these would lessen the environmental impact of gasoline and diesel fuel, natural gas and methanol would contribute to the greenhouse effect and methanol would produce formaldehyde, a carcinogen. On the other hand, ethanol, made from biomass recently produced by photosynthesis—so that the carbon dioxide released in burning equals that earlier withdrawn from the air—is a solar fuel that would not add to carbon dioxide levels and is relatively free of noxious emissions. Moreover, ethanol production from biomass is a technology appropriate to Third World countries. Low-cost, efficient ethanol facilities would help them establish self-sufficient energy systems.

Too frequently remedial measures are proposed that would narrowly benefit industrialized countries but not the developing ones that are in the greatest need. Energy conservation is an interesting example. Conservation—that is, reducing the amount of energy from fossil fuels needed to achieve a given productive output—is an unequivocally good thing, both environmentally and economically. However, when elevated to the level of a universal prescription for preventing global warming, conservation of fossil fuels is not sufficient. In this context it has a major defect: Its value as a means of reducing carbon dioxide emissions gradually diminishes as industrial production and the accompanying use of energy are expanded for the sake of economic development. The point to keep in mind is that conservation of fossil fuel energy reduces carbon dioxide production, but not to zero. Hence, further economic development will eventually eliminate the initial advantage.

Thus, for Third World countries, conservation of fossil fuels as the exclusive, or even main, environmental strategy is unrealistic. Efficiency measures that cut the use of fossil fuels by 50 percent would be nullified, with respect to carbon dioxide output, once productive activity is doubled—a goal that developing countries might hope to achieve in twenty years or less. To be compatible with economic development, action to prevent global warming must include the expanded use of solar energy.

## Production Incentives

So if the necessary technology exists, what is required to activate it? What institutional mechanisms would help to introduce the social interest in environmental quality into the decisions that now govern the technology of production? There is, in fact, a little-used instrument that might begin the transformation of production technologies: the market power of government purchases. Consider the growth of one of the country's great entrepreneurial successes, the computer industry. In the 1950s the U.S. military establishment sought to develop missiles capable of intricate maneuvers to find Soviet targets, with complex electronic guidance

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systems tucked into the space of a nose cone. The answer was a new device, the integrated circuit computer chip. At the time, the United States had no large-scale facilities for producing such devices, which would be needed in the many thousands. Undeterred, the Pentagon used a simple economic lure to persuade private entrepreneurs to undertake the task: It offered lucrative contracts against which an entrepreneur could borrow enough money to set up highly rationalized production facilities. Orders duly increased, production expanded and accelerated, and in a few years a computer chip that originally cost $50 came down to $2.50. Suddenly, it was possible to build pocket calculators that sold for a few dollars, and not much later we had the word processor and the desk-top computer.

During the Carter Administration an effort was made but never followed through to replicate this practice for the mass production of photovoltaic cells. At the time, these semiconductor devices, which convert sunlight directly into electricity, were produced by sawing large crystals of silicon into very thin slices. They cost about $20 per peak watt (a unit representing the amount of DC power a cell will produce when the sun is at its peak intensity). The total manufacturing capacity of the U.S. photovoltaic cell industry then was less than one megawatt per year, and Congress, learning from past experience, was convinced that large orders of these cells for federal installations would bring the price down from about $20 to $2–$3 per peak watt within a year, to $1 in three years, and to 50 cents in five years. As the price drops, the market expands enormously, so that, for example, at $1 per peak watt photovoltaic cells would become economically feasible for roadside lighting, a demand of about 50,000 megawatts. At 50 cents photovoltaic cells were expected to be competitive with electric utilities in many parts of the country.

This strategy of federal purchases could be used to improve environmental quality by producing a smog-free engine. According to a study by the National Science Foundation, the stratified charge engine existed in 1974 as a prototype from the Ford Motor Company. It was capable of achieving the 90 percent reduction in nitrogen oxide emissions mandated by the Clean Air Act of 1970 and therefore could have sharply reduced smog production. If a decision to build the engine had been made in 1974, it would have replaced standard engines in the entire fleet of U.S. passenger vehicles by 1988.

The federal government buys more than $7 billion worth of cars and trucks annually, based on highly detailed specifications. Suppose that the specification for a stratified charge engine, or some other design capable of qualitatively reducing emissions, were added to the bid requirements. Surely one of the Detroit companies, struggling against Japanese competition, would respond. Once that happened, the total replacement of the present smog-generating engines would be inevitable, if only because public demand is likely to insist on the benefits of smog-free engines being spread from the federal government to the taxpayers who support it.

The same could be done in many other fields. Now that we know that a system of intensive recycling can replace

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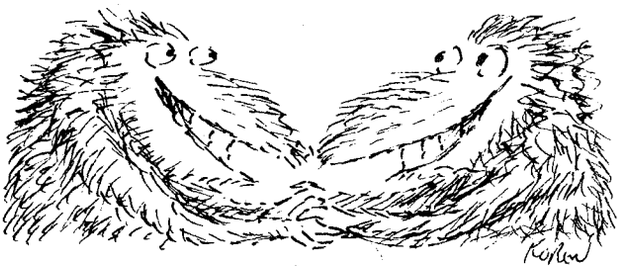

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trash-burning incinerators, the federal government could readily require that its installations dispose of their trash through such recycling. This would immediately create great demand for materials-recovery facilities and compost plants, converting a now-minuscule industry into one sufficiently large to come knocking on the doors of the country's cities and towns for their trash disposal business. In the same way, if purchase orders specified that fruit and vegetables for government cafeterias had to be organically grown, the transformation of agriculture would be greatly stimulated.

In the short term such market mechanisms make a certain amount of sense. But they are only reactions to years of destructive experience. They will not protect us from new mistakes. The evolution of technology will continue, and left to their own profit-maximizing devices, future capitalists will make new environmental mistakes. The prospect of enduring them for a generation or so before the ecological faults are detected and the production processes responsible for them are gradually defeated in the marketplace is an unacceptable answer to the ongoing war between the ecosphere and the technosphere. In making decisions that govern production technology, only social intervention in this now-private province makes sense.

If private governance of production—the characteristic feature of capitalism—is at fault, what can account for the horrendous levels of pollution in socialist countries, where production decisions have presumably been under social control? One reason, of course, is that environmental advocates have, until recently, not been free to comment on, let alone influence, government decisions. Another reason is that most of the systems of production adopted by the socialist countries—for example, chemical agriculture, nuclear power and petrochemical manufacturing—were developed in capitalist countries, where their design was governed by short-term profit maximization, to the exclusion of environmental and other social concerns.

Thus, social governance of production has failed to materialize in either capitalist or socialist countries. What is called for is the extension of democracy into the arena in which production decisions are made. In the United States, that means the corporate board room, and the appointment of a token environmentalist will not do. Is this an illusory goal? Recent history urges an answer, reminding us that the democratic impulse—which fueled the civil rights movement in the United States and the upheavals in Eastern Europe—can be translated into profound change. If that impulse has broken through the Berlin wall, surely it can find a way to open the door to the corporate board room. The environmental experience points the way; now it is time to learn how to traverse this historic passage. □

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THE CUTTING EDGE

# The Trouble With Earth Day

KIRKPATRICK SALE

Imagine that a small child with many bruises is brought into a doctor's office and the physician is told that she has been repeatedly beaten. The first question to be asked is surely, Where does it hurt? with an inspection and remedies to follow. But it would be only the most callous and unethical doctor who would refrain from asking a series of other questions: How did it happen? Who did it? When? How long has this been going on? Why? How can we prevent it from happening again?

Imagine, then, that a society understands it is suffering from multiple environmental assaults of great seriousness. The first question it would ask itself is surely, Where does it hurt? and, assuming it to be a rational society, it would order an inspection and provide remedies, and swiftly and efficiently, too. But it would be only the most insensitive and basically self-destructive society that would refrain from asking a similar series of subsequent questions—in particular, Who did it? Where? Why? How can we prevent it from happening again?

In general the environmental organizations in this country and the official agencies that have grown up in response to them have not, over the past two decades, gotten beyond the most elemental Where-does-it-hurt? questions; certainly they have not raised the deeper, subsequent questions or demanded the still deeper answers. Earth Day 1990, I regret to say, for all its ballyhoo and good intentions, has moved not one step out of that mire.

Earth Day 1990, the principal organization behind this month's Earth Week, April 16–22, does ask, Where does it hurt? often and loudly, and its answers are the by-now-familiar litany: global warming, ozone depletion, deforestation, overpopulation, pollution of air and water, toxic waste, nuclear energy, overflowing landfills, resource depletion, acid rain, chemical poisoning. And it forthrightly confronts the question of how to fix those problems. On that basis it has set up a $3 million operation with a national

*Kirkpatrick Sale is author of* SDS *(Random House) and* Human Scale *(Coward, McCann), among other books. His book on Christopher Columbus,* The Conquest of Paradise, *will be published by Alfred A. Knopf in October.*

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headquarters, fifteen regional offices, an agenda of 3,000 events and an occasion that will bring more crowds, media attention, political hype, celebrities and T-shirt sellers to environmental issues than any other in the nation's history.

But it is an operation—however well meaning, however many good people involved—that is, at its core, a shuck. For after telling us where it hurts, it gives us only the most simplistic sorts of remedies. Its first is personal "life-style" Band-Aids for hemorrhaging wounds and do-it-yourself surgery; its second is the nostrum of federal laws and regulations, providing the patient with more of the kind of cures that created the disease. And it never gets around to asking—much less proposing answers for—those fundamental questions this society must be forced to face: Who, really, is causing the degradation and destruction of the environment? How can they be stopped, and stopped short, not just "regulated" and "overseen" and reformed? Why has society allowed this to go on, to the point that all oxygen-dependent species, including humans, are imperiled, and why do we seem powerless to prevent it? What would it take to accomplish the serious, wrenching, full-scale readjustments that in fact are necessary to save the earth, including reduced standards of living, consumption and growth; severe population reduction; and a new, modest, regardful relationship with the earth and its species? Who is going to carry this literally vital message to the American people? And *when*? For the time, as every new crisis lets us know, is later than we think.

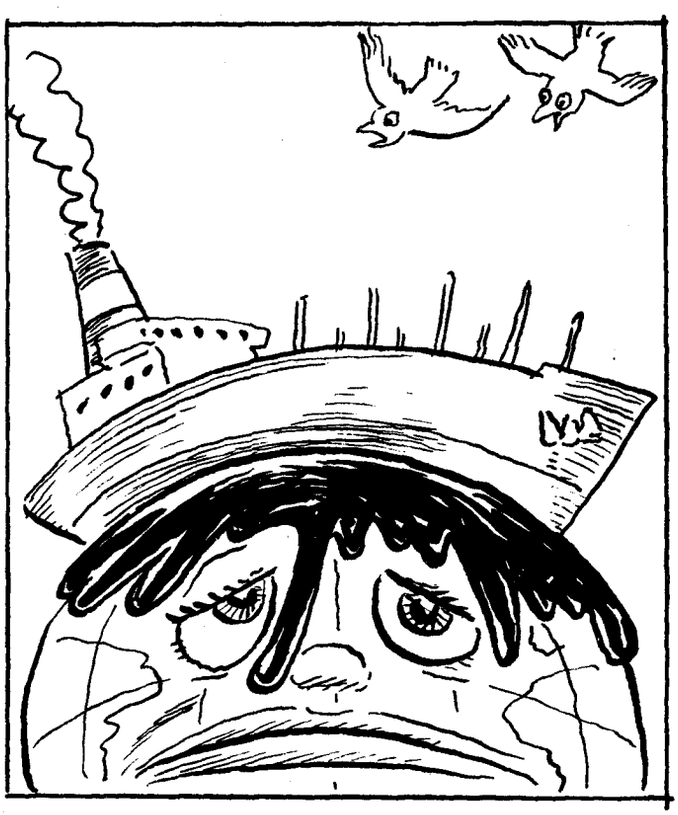
Let me be specific. Earth Day has four fundamental problems that to me seem to undermine its chance to create effective change and in some ways threaten to make it counterproductive.

First, like the rowdydow of books and articles over the past year since *Time*'s Planet-of-the-Year klaxon call, Earth Day's primary emphasis is on individual responses: "what *you* can do" to stop ozone depletion or rain forest destruction. This hints-from-Heloise approach (actually Heloise *does* have a book coming out on how you can save the world right in your kitchen) is, not to put too fine a point on it, asinine. According to the Earth Day "fact sheets," what "you" are supposed to do about ozone depletion is "immediately repair any leaks in your refrigerator," "consider alternatives to rigid foam insulation" and the like; about acid rain, "cut down on your energy consumption" and "write letters to members of Congress"; about global warming, "cut down on your energy consumption" and "promote family planning"; about rain forest destruction, "avoid eating fast-food hamburgers" and "organize and attend rain forest benefits"; and so on. "Earth Day 1990," its literature proclaims, "is rooted in a belief that people—individually and collectively—do indeed count" and that "the environmental crisis . . . is not beyond our care and control."

Look, I am as responsible as most eco-citizens: I bike everywhere; I don't own a car; I recycle newspapers, bottles, cans and plastics; I have a vegetable garden in the summer; I buy organic products; and I put all vegetable waste into my backyard compost bin, probably the only one in all of Greenwich Village. But I don't at the same time believe that I am saving the planet, or in fact doing anything of much consequence about the various eco-crises around us. What's more, I don't even believe that if "all of us" as individuals started doing the same it would make any but the slightest difference, and then only of degree and not—where it counts—of kind.

Leave aside ozone depletion and rain forest destruction—those are patently corporate crimes that no individual actions will remedy to any degree. Take, instead, energy consumption in this country. In 1987 (the most recent figures) residential consumption was 7.2 percent of the total, commercial 5.5 percent and industrial 23.3 percent; of the remainder, 27.8 percent was transportation (about one-third of it by private car) and 36.3 percent was electric generation (about one-third for residential use). Individual energy use, in sum, was something like 28 percent of total consumption. Therefore, although you and I cutting down on energy consumption would have some small effect (and should be done), it is surely the energy consumption of industry and other large institutions such as government and agribusiness that needs to be addressed first. And it is industry and government that must be forced to explain what their consumption is for, what is produced by it, how necessary it is and how it can be drastically reduced. They need an Earth Day more than we do.

The point is that the ecological crisis *is* essentially beyond "our" control, as citizens or householders or consumers or even voters. It is not something that can be halted by recycling or double-pane insulation. It is the inevitable by-product of our modern industrial civilization, dominated by capitalist production and consumption and serviced and protected by various institutions of government, federal to local.



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It cannot possibly be altered or reversed by simple individual actions, even by the actions of the millions who will take part in Earth Day—and even if they all went home and fixed their refrigerators and from then on walked to work. Nothing less than a drastic overhaul of this civilization and an abandonment of its ingrained gods—progress, growth, exploitation, technology, materialism, humanism and power—will do anything substantial to halt our path to environmental destruction, and it's hard to see how the life-style solutions offered by Earth Day will have an effect on that.

What I find truly pernicious about such solutions is that they get people thinking they are actually making a difference and doing their part to halt the destruction of the earth: "There, I've taken all the bottles to the recycling center and used my string bag at the grocery store; I guess that'll take care of global warming." It is the kind of thing that diverts people from the hard truths and hard choices and hard actions, from the recognition that they have to take on the larger forces of society—corporate and governmental—where true power, and true destructiveness, lie.

And to the argument that, well, you have to start somewhere to raise people's consciousness, I would reply that this individualistic approach does not in fact raise consciousness. It does not move people beyond their old familiar liberal perceptions of the world, it does nothing to challenge the belief in technofix or write-your-Congressperson solutions and it does not begin to provide them with the new vocabulary and modes of thought necessary for a true change of consciousness. We need, for example, to think of recycling centers not as the answer to our waste problems, as Earth Day suggests, but as a confession that the system of packaging and production in this society is out of control. Recyling centers are like hospitals; they are the institutions at the end of the cycle that take care of problems that would never exist if ecological criteria had operated at the beginning of the cycle. Until we have those kinds of understandings, we will not do anything with consciousness except reinforce it with the same misguided ideas that created the crisis.

Second, Earth Day is designed to be a weeklong media bash and not a long-range grass-roots campaign with a clear and continuing political thrust. It is founded on the assumption, challengeable at best, that it was Earth Day 1970 that was responsible for the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency, passage of the Clean Water and Clean Air acts and perhaps public support for environmental lobbies in Washington. So this time around the operating theory is that all you have to do is imitate the original event but make it bigger and you will automatically create, in the words of Earth Day 1990 chair Denis Hayes, "a citizens' army" for a "Decade of the Environment" and thus the constituency to force "a worldwide ban on chlorofluorocarbons by 1995," an 85 percent reduction in fossil fuel use by 2015 and an 80 percent reduction in acid rain.

There's nothing wrong with those goals, but why anyone would imagine that they could acquire a strong and active constituency as a result of a week of media-filtered eco-hype is somewhat puzzling. But this is the Earth Day strategy. Most of the $3 million the organization is raising nationally and the $1 million or so being raised locally is going to be spent on the events of Earth Week, culminating in the big marches and rallies of Earth Day. Very little is being devoted to building up a door-to-door outreach campaign that might take the movement beyond the already converted; very little to knitting existing neighborhood, watchdog and environmental groups into a political network; and nothing at all, as far as I can tell, on the establishment of an organization for the continuing battle after the Earth Day tents are folded up on April 23.

Then too, the assumption behind Earth Day politics—when it is political at all—is that passing laws works to protect the environment. "We expect the world's governments," Hayes says, "to . . . actively begin addressing the wide array of urgent, important problems facing the planet." Well, in some cases passing laws can make a marginal difference, if the laws are tough, clear and easily enforceable—such as the ban on DDT (though it did not halt production of DDT entirely or its use overseas). But anyone who has studied the effect of the Clean Water and Clean Air acts in the past two decades cannot argue that they have been notably successful; anyone who has seen the miserable failure of the Superfund cleanups cannot assume that federal financing is effective; anyone who has watched the generally bumbling and bureaucratized processes of the E.P.A. cannot have a lot of confidence in its ability to control pollution, even when ordered to do so, in any serious way. Perhaps this legalistic strategy stems from the fact that so many of the people running Earth Day on the national level are lawyers, and that so many on its national board are politicians and lobbyists, but it's pretty late in the day to think that Congress or the E.P.A. is the place to go for environmental change.

I do think it would be possible to take $3 million and unlimited publicity and create an effective and tough-minded movement to identify the eco-criminals in our midst and work to put a stop to them, even to build support for the elements of an ecologically based society that would not permit such criminals to exist. But that takes time, commitment and a clear sense of values and goals, and Earth Day 1990 does not have enough of any of those. It's going in for the one-time splash, and that's unfortunate.

Third, I believe it is a fundamental tactical as well as philosophical error for the people working for substantial environmental transformation to make common cause with the very forces that are responsible for the eco-crisis in the first place or that are entirely wrapped up in the present lobbyist-lawyer-consultant-legislator-bureaucrat establishment that perpetuates it. This applies to corporations, of course, and to government agencies at all levels, but it applies

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also to the political and environmental do-goos who try to picture themselves as cleaner and greener than thou.

To their credit, the Earth Day organizers have not simply raised money from any corporation hoping to buy a good environmental image; they have also insisted that the sponsors show "some specific pro-environmental change in corporate behavior" and "an ongoing commitment to dialogue . . . with environmental advocates." The organizers have made explicit their commitment to the Valdez Principles promulgated last year by environmentalists, which are supposed to make corporations "conduct their business as responsible stewards of the environment and seek profits only in a manner that leaves the earth healthy and safe." Yet they have also gone after big corporations and wealthy individuals with great avidity—among the sponsors are Esprit, Church & Dwight, Shaklee and Coca-Cola—and they've put on their national board the heads of a dozen corporations and the likes of Ted Turner, Laurance Rockefeller, Vidal Sassoon and Jann Wenner. And they seem totally blind to the elemental ecological truth that, at bottom, the modern industrial economy is antithetical to ecological harmony; or, as Jeremy Seabrook has put it, "If it had been the purpose of human activity on earth to bring the planet to the edge of ruin, no more efficient mechanism could have been invented than the market economy."

The opportunity exists, twenty years after the first Earth Day and twenty-eight years after the publication of *Silent Spring*, to raise some substantial questions about the nature of our industrial society: Who is producing the poisons of the field, who is cutting down the rain forests, who is causing acid rain, and why? But that would mean pointing fingers not only at conglomerate America but at the culture that sustains it, and this the Earth Day organizers cannot bring themselves to do, even if they had insight enough to recognize the problem.

It is the same undemanding willingness of Earth Day 1990 to work with those who will work with it that has allowed so many politicians and admen and media moguls and environmental do-goos to jump on its careening bandwagon. Already the national board is heavily laden with such types, and Earth Day itself will bring out still more, all nudging for a place in the limelight and a seal of good earthkeeping. But just to show how risky a business this is, let's look at one man who graces the national board, Senator George Mitchell: He's the fellow who only recently showed his colors again when he worked so hard to gut President Bush's already fatuous "clean air" bill, arranging a behind-the-scenes deal that could not have delighted the auto companies and the electric utilities more.

Perhaps more disturbing, though, is the way that the organizers have let the environmental lobbies swarm around Earth Day like fish in a feeding frenzy. These are not sinister organizations, of course, but inevitably, doing what they do, they are accomplices in the basically sham process of environmental protection run out of Washington and in the political structure that supports it. They foster the idea that environmental politics consists in passing laws in Washington, that it is the work of specialists and experts and that it


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does not have anything to do with economic concentration, market forces, control of resources, community disfranchisement or ecological blindness. And their notion of strategy, not by accident similar to Earth Day 1990's, is to press for life-style changes on the one hand and send in a "generous tax-deductible Citizen Sponsor contribution" on the other. It is time to leave those lobby professionals behind; time to move on.

Finally, and to me most distressing, the organizers and sponsors of Earth Day at all levels seem to have no awareness of any other endangered species than the human, any other crises than those that threaten human comfort and consumption. In all the Earth Day literature—and it is copious; let's not even think of the number of trees felled—I have found only two or three halfhearted phrases, like "help preserve wetland habitat" and "water diversion often leads to destruction of wildlife," that move beyond a single-minded anthropocentrism. Most of it is unembarrassedly about "the peril to our species" and the need for "public safety and human dignity" and suchlike.

Each day of Earth Week, for example, has been given over to a separate environmental issue. They are, in order, energy efficiency, recycling, water conservation, alternative transportation, toxin information and outdoor recreation. Each one, as you can see, is wholly concerned with human problems, human systems, human safety and basically how (American) humans can go on living at the same material level over the long haul without messing things up for themselves. Nowhere on that list is there any consideration of what are thought to be animals' (or trees' or rivers') rights; nowhere any regard for the ongoing extinction of species caused by humans; nowhere a concern for the countless other species that are being threatened daily by the destruction and poisoning of habitats; nowhere any thought given to the restoration of the natural systems of the living earth and learning to live in them as the first people did. Above all, nowhere on the list is there found any consideration of wilderness, of the need for a healthy earth to have places where humans don't intervene, where the full complexity and diversity of life are allowed to flourish unimpeded. All that the Earth Day people can see is something called—just think of the implications—"outdoors," and all they can think of doing there is human "recreation."

The reason this is important is that until the human understands itself as a species—"reapplies for membership in the biosphere," as the eco-historian Thomas Berry has put it—it will never stop treating the earth and its treasures ("resources") as the rightful food for its omnivorous maw, will never stop acting as if it owns the earth and has the right of "dominion over" its species. This is not a matter of passing laws or double-paning windows; this is a deep reordering of values, a new (and very old) way of understanding the earth and its species as sacred, an ecological consciousness that goes right to the heart of our lives. Without it no profound changes will come, or last.

It was perhaps unrealistic of me to have expected that even such a clearheaded fellow as Denis Hayes would have come to embrace the very challenging concept of biocentrism (or ecocentrism, if you will) for Earth Day, or that, if he had, he would have been able to make it understood by the likes of Ted Turner and George Mitchell, not to mention the innumerable directors and staff members around the country. But Earth Day's overwhelming concentration on human peril and human survival still came as a bit of a surprise to me, I must admit, and a disappointment. (Could the reason for this failure have something to do with the fact that only 17 percent of Earth Day 1990's national board are women, who are traditionally more sensitive here?) It shows what a long way we have to go before we achieve that essential alteration of values and perceptions that must come before we begin the work of transforming our civilization from the industrial to the ecological.

However, I do not despair of Earth Day entirely. I belong to three organizations that will be taking part in activities of one kind or another in New York City; I will be participating in a couple of forums and giving a talk during Earth Week; and I will get up early on Sunday to travel out to the middle of Pennsylvania to give another talk on Earth Day itself. It is obviously a time when at least some part of the population will wish to hear messages about the earth, and they need not all be shallow and individualistic.

In short, we must make of Earth Day what we can. Many I know will take the opportunity to criticize, in a friendly fashion, and to educate when and where they can. Many will regard it as an occasion to organize and recruit for one righteous cause or another. And many will treat it merely as day one of a campaign to carry on with the spirit of Earth Day (or their version of Earth Day) in a more concerted and farseeing way. David Levine, for example, who is the director of an activist education program in New York called the Learning Alliance, has put it this way:

"Earth Day isn't all that we wanted it to be, but we don't see it as the end of this job of saving the earth; it's the beginning. Some of us are going to use the energy that it's created, the new people it's brought in and the new alliances we've made, and build on that for the future. This is the *decade* of the environment. Remember, we've got ten years to put into practice the lessons we learn from this Earth Day, and we'll make it better next time, and we'll keep up the pressure everywhere. Come Earth Day 2000, maybe we can even celebrate."

Perhaps; it is to be hoped. But we had best use this occasion to start asking the right questions. One day devoted to Where-does-it-hurt? is all right, but only if it leads to Who? and Why? and How often? and above all, What will it take to stop it? Those are questions that we have to begin asking ourselves and the politicians, lobbyists, C.E.O.s and powers-that-be in every dimension of our lives. □

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'A FASCIST DISNEYLAND'

# Burma's Surreal Police State

SUSAN BLAUSTEIN

*Rangoon*

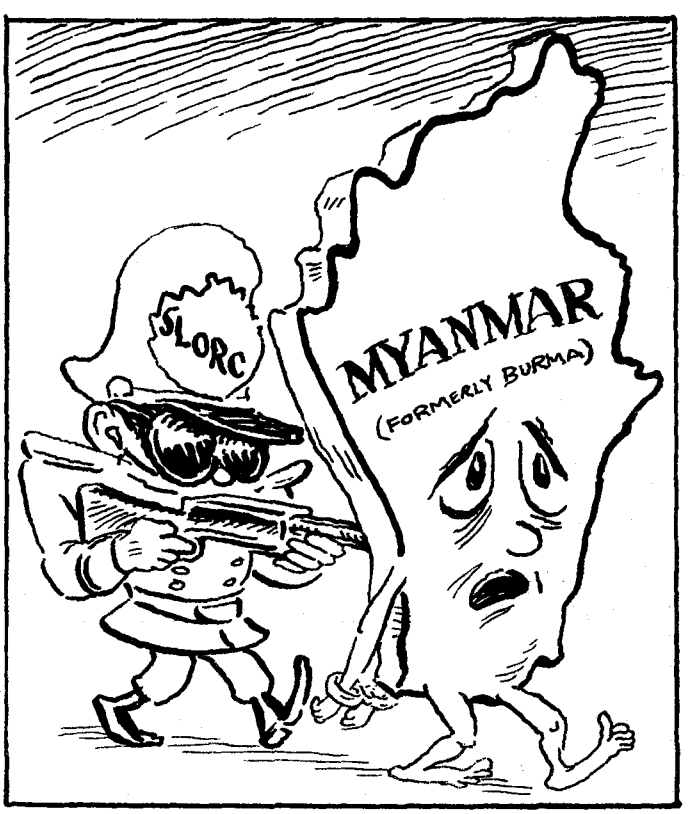
At a recent informal reunion of university classmates in an upper-middle-class suburb of Rangoon, the host introduced a foreign acquaintance to his friends, all Burmese professionals in their late 40s. "We're all government employees here," he said. Then pausing, he shook his fist in his guest's face, adding, "And we all hate the government."

It is difficult to find anyone inside Burma—or Myanmar, as it is now known—who does not hate the current military regime. Most people are afraid to be seen speaking with or entertaining foreigners, because the State Law and Order Restoration Council, or the SLORC, as the new government calls itself, has an elaborate intelligence apparatus, with informers allegedly posted in every city block. Since September 1988, when the military reasserted power after violently suppressing Burma's nationwide pro-democracy movement by shooting, imprisoning and torturing thousands of demonstrators, the SLORC has ruled in at least as arbitrary and repressive a fashion as its predecessor, Gen. Ne Win. Although Ne Win, now 79, announced his resignation in July 1988, in the heat of the demonstrations, his strong arm is widely assumed still to be steering the SLORC, which may have outdone its mentor in alienating Burma's population, isolating the country and savaging its economy.

Led into ruin by Ne Win's ill-advised "Burmese Way to Socialism," this once-wealthy nation was accorded least developed country status by the United Nations in 1987, to the chagrin of Burma's former elite, who like to remind visitors that there was a time when Bangkok matrons came to Rangoon to shop. Burmese are also humiliated by reports of malnutrition in remote regions, and of people in Rangoon's working-class suburbs who are forced to buy rice water because they cannot afford rice. Although the SLORC more than doubled government salaries in April 1989, annual inflation is running at 40 to 50 percent and most government employees complain that the $100 a month they now earn barely buys enough food for their families. Their sugar and oil rations are frequently jeopardized by shortages, which also plague almost every locally obtained commodity, from fish to electrical power.

In recent years, and particularly since the SLORC seized control, manufacturing and heavy industries have been crippled both by ineffective management and by the lack of gasoline, serviceable equipment and transport. The directors of most government corporations are former military officers, few of whom have any prior business experience. What keeps the government functioning, according to one economist from an international lending agency, is the extensive and largely tolerated black market, which supplies in smuggled goods what state-run enterprises are unable to produce. Progress in agricultural production, transport, communications and banking has come to a virtual standstill since the government cut itself off from its sources of foreign aid and diverted an estimated 50 percent of its budget to finance its bloated and powerful military. The budget deficit for 1988-89 was more than $1 billion, the foreign debt is close to $5 billion and the currency is officially valued at eight times the black-market rate. Last fall the International Monetary Fund recommended a 90 percent devaluation, but so far the SLORC has refused, insisting that such a move would only increase the already debilitating foreign debt. The SLORC has temporarily finessed its debt problem by stopping payments altogether to Japan and West Germany, its two largest creditors.

Some SLORC officials are actively trying to encourage foreign investment, but the new investment code is riddled with imprecision, and there is as yet no reliable mortgage or lending institution for private-sector activities. With the nation's dilapidated infrastructure, unstable political situation and dauntingly low rate of exchange, most potential investors seem reluctant to come in. The government's virtually empty coffers were rescued from bankruptcy by the large advances paid by nine foreign oil companies that have contracted for onshore exploration, and by more than fifty Thai and Singaporean companies interested in Burma's abundance of extractable commodities (see sidebar on page 600). Thai Airways International and smaller Asian firms are hungrily eyeing Burma's marvelous venues for tourism, and in northern Burma's Shan State, one Thai company has




*Susan Blaustein is a freelance writer based in Manila.*

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# The Insurgents

*Manerplaw, Karen State*

After the military seized power in September 1988, many thousands of students, teachers, workers, professionals, farmers and monks fled to Burma's borders, where they joined ethnic minorities in their longstanding guerrilla war against the government in Rangoon. Most of the new revolutionaries belong to an organization called the All-Burma Students Democratic Front (A.B.S.D.F.), which was formed by the ethnic groups as part of a broadly based resistance coalition called the Democratic Alliance of Burma. The D.A.B. program calls for a newly constituted federal union that will guarantee the rights of minorities to retain their own cultures and govern their own states. The D.A.B. has also called for a nationwide boycott of the May 27 elections, in which all members of the ethnic political opposition have been forbidden to participate. The prohibition also covers all those suspected of taking part in the 1988 demonstrations.

Several thousand of these pro-democracy demonstrators came to the liberated areas of Karen State, in southeastern Burma along the Thai border, where they were fed, armed and trained by the Karen National Union (K.N.U.) and its military arm, the Karen National Liberation Army (K.N.L.A.). The Karen, one of Burma's thirty to forty indigenous populations, number as many as 3 million nationwide, and have been fighting for autonomy and minority rights since Burma gained its independence from Britain in 1948. (Tens of thousands of Karen and other ethnic groups have taken refuge in Thailand.)

The Karen's forty-year-old struggle, long since relegated to a sideshow in the drama of Burma's painfully protracted decline under its longtime dictator, Gen. Ne Win, has gathered new momentum with the influx to its territory of the young Burmese rebels. But the new strategic alliance between the dissident urban elite and hill-tribe guerrilla fighters has not been without conflict. The care and military training of those who flocked to Karen State was an unexpected drain on the K.N.U.'s already stretched resources, costing $800 a day, at the start, for rice alone. "That's two rifles a day," complained one K.N.U. official ruefully, adding that the K.N.U. was forced to turn away "many thousands" of students because "we couldn't feed or arm them."

Some Karen also resent the fact that their revolution was brought to international attention only upon the arrest and persecution of ethnic Burmese, many of whom admit that they grew up fearing and hating the Karen, who are regularly denounced in the government newspaper as "communists," "criminals" and "lackeys of the foreign imperialistic stooges." Since coming to the border, these young Burmese have realized that the Karen share their grievances and their desire to overthrow the Rangoon government. Few anticipated, however, how long that might take, and many students, not prepared for the grueling jungle life, have returned home. Of the thousand or so who remain in the K.N.U. and A.B.S.D.F. camps along the Thai border, nearly all have malaria and very few have guns.

The Karen have traditionally financed their revolution by taxing border trade in and out of Karen State and by trading with Thai merchants and local officials, exchanging teak and cattle for black-market consumer goods, medicines, arms and ammunition—the latter readily available after forty years of Indochinese wars. Now the Burmese government, desperate for foreign exchange, has intensified its campaign against the ethnic minorities in order to gain control of the lucrative border trade.

Top Thai officials, always with an eye turned to possible business opportunities and eager to supply their country's insatiable timber industry with another source of teak (having denuded Thailand's own forests to the point of causing devastating floods), were the first to salute the new military regime when then-Thai Supreme Commander Gen. Chaovalit Yongchaiyudh paid a state visit to Rangoon not three months after the violent military crackdown in 1988. Within days, six Thai companies signed contracts to log Burmese teak, much of which is found in Karen State. Since then more than forty Thai companies have acquired teak-logging concessions, and a host of others are now busily exporting fish, minerals and gems from Burma. These "cash-down" deals have revived Burma's depleted foreign reserve chest.

Last fall the Burmese launched a major dry-season offensive aimed at wiping out the Karen insurgency and monopolizing the Thai border trade. In the past four months, K.N.U. and A.B.S.D.F. forces have suffered a string of military defeats. Their leaders readily acknowledge that their forces are greatly outnumbered, and that they can no longer count on the quiet cooperation of the Thais to keep the arms, ammunition and resalable goods flowing into Karen State. Defense analysts agree that even in combination, the estimated 15,000 armed soldiers of the three largest ethnic armies are no match for the 200,000 Burmese troops, and that under current conditions, only a split within the military or Ne Win's death could provoke the overthrow of the current regime. Meanwhile, Burmese troops continue to torch Karen villages and terrorize their inhabitants, more students are dying of malaria and cholera than in battle and the effectively silenced Burmese population desperately wishes for change.

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begun construction of a large luxury resort. But aside from these quickly struck deals and a few other much-touted exceptions, such as one languishing Korean department store, a nonbinding letter of intent from Coca-Cola and a handful of small joint ventures with China, the SLORC's recent attempts to liberalize the economy have not really begun to pay off. Most foreign aid was suspended when the military seized power, and, except for Japan, which returned with part of its aid package in January 1989 when the SLORC announced its intention to hold credible elections, most assistance programs are not likely to resume before that commitment is honored.

The SLORC has scheduled elections on May 27 for a constituent assembly, which will draft a new constitution. Following a referendum on the proposed document, the SLORC has agreed to hand over power to a duly elected parliament. But few Burmese believe that the military has any intention of giving up control. And virtually no one believes that the upcoming elections will be "free and fair," as promised. Since mid-December, one prominent opposition leader has been sentenced to three years' hard labor; a second, 84-year-old dissident and former Prime Minister U Nu, has been placed under house arrest; and the charismatic Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest since last July 20, was barred in January from running for public office. With many party headquarters shut down, several thousand opposition party members in prison, and only one newspaper and one government-controlled television station, would-be candidates have had difficulty making their voices heard.

The concept of self-governance is weak in this country, where barely twelve years of elected parliamentary government were sandwiched between a century of colonial rule and a quarter-century of dictatorship. Interestingly, there is no word in the Burmese language for democracy. One articulate student leader, a Rangoon University English major named Aung Naing Oo, said that during the 1988 demonstrations, when people continuously shouted, "Democracy, democracy!" he had to look up the word in a dictionary to know what they were talking about. Yet opposition leaders have been consistently passionate, single-minded and courageous in their efforts to rid Burma of its oppressive ruling junta. Despite the SLORC's ongoing harassment of citizens suspected of having contacts with opposition members, and a new SLORC statute that prohibits outdoor gatherings of more than five people, small-scale "pinpricks of a protest," as one diplomat put it, have become more frequent in recent months. Just before curfew, small children now run out to hang posters that condemn the present regime and support opposition candidates. At school, students shout pro-democracy slogans in class, often with their teachers' tacit approval. And after school, groups of fifty to sixty teenagers have taken to converging suddenly in the street, shouting pro-democracy slogans and quickly dispersing. Shortly before Aung San Suu Kyi's candidacy was banned, illegal opposition party leaflets bearing her picture and handwritten statement promising to stand for election, if allowed, were suddenly available all over Rangoon.

"This place is a fascist Disneyland," said a Rangoon-based diplomat. In many ways, life under the military dictatorship is indeed surreal. The British colonial-vintage buildings that line the capital's gracious boulevards, once a faded cream color, now sport a full palette of vibrant pinks, ochers and blues, because after the 1988 demonstrations the SLORC threatened to cut off the water, electricity, rice, sugar and oil rations of those who did not paint their home by the end of the year. Frantic to get the job done, people used whatever paint they could find and afford.

The SLORC has made another attempt to brighten up the cities and inject a note of moral edification. Within months of the military takeover, enormous red billboards appeared all over the country, bearing such messages as "Love the Motherland and Respect the Law." Outside Aung San Suu Kyi's home is a billboard warning that "Anyone Who Gets Riotous, Destructive or Unruly Is Our Enemy." Another placard, prominently placed outside the U.S. Embassy, where some thirty demonstrators took refuge in September 1988, proclaims, "Down With Minions of Colonialism."

Some SLORC improvements are more sinister. Last year the regime built a concrete, bunkerlike wall along one main artery into Rangoon. More than a mile long, the dark red wall rims the Ministry of Defense and is outfitted with small slits for soldiers to fire through. In recent months army trucks have rumbled through the streets of Rangoon each night, carting off squatters and their possessions to remote areas where there are no houses, running water, electricity, schools or medical facilities. Except for one "free" truckload of belongings, all costs of the relocations fall to the newly dispossessed, who must also make exorbitant payoffs if they want to remain within commuting distance of their jobs. Residents and diplomats speculate that the summary flattening of thousands of urban dwellings formerly housing the poor is part of the SLORC's recent effort to "sanitize" the cities by removing potential demonstrators.

But after the bloody turn of events in 1988, there remain few inside Burma who believe that demonstrations or other grass-roots-level initiatives can effect a change in government without the help of a military coup. People here are well aware that their children's cries for democracy cannot compete with a deeply entrenched, well-oiled military machine. As one resident analyst put it, even if the SLORC is universally detested, "only one side has the guns here."

Hopelessness among Burmese about the economy, the elections and the prospects for change is palpable all over the country. One afternoon, seated in a monastery courtyard in Mandalay, under rustling acacia trees and over a snack of palm sweets and peanuts, two Buddhist monks spoke about the depth of people's loathing for and dread of the current regime. The two mentioned that they listened regularly to Voice of America and the BBC, and they marveled at the recent stunning successes of Eastern Europe's pro-democracy movements. One wrote out his address and asked to be sent "news from the world." When he finished, he pointed to what he had written. "Now they call it 'Myanmar,'" the monk explained. He sighed and shook his head. "In Burma, only the name has been changed." □

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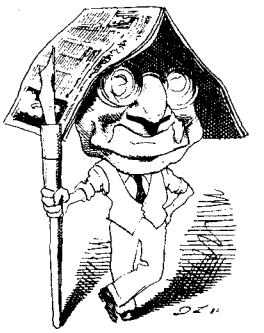

## ENTRY DEADLINE: JUNE 30, 1990

**PURPOSE:** *The Nation* magazine/I.F. Stone Award recognizes excellence in student journalism. Entries should exhibit the uniquely independent journalistic tradition of I.F. Stone. A self-described "Jeffersonian Marxist," Stone combined progressive politics, investigative zeal and a compulsion to tell the truth with a commitment to human rights and the exposure of injustice. As Washington editor of *The Nation* and founder of the legendary *I.F. Stone's Weekly,* he specialized in publishing information ignored by the mainstream media (which he often found in *The Congressional Record* and other public documents overlooked by the big-circulation dailies).

**ELIGIBILITY:** The contest is open to all undergraduate students enrolled in a U.S. college. Articles may be submitted by the writers themselves or nominated by editors of student publications or faculty members. While entries originally published in student publications are preferred, unpublished articles also will be considered provided they were not written as part of a student's regular course work.

**THE PRIZE:** The article that, in the opinion of the judges, represents the most outstanding example of student journalism in the tradition of I.F. Stone will be published in a fall issue of *The Nation*. The winner will receive a cash award of $500. *The Nation* reserves the right to edit the winning article to conform to the space limitations of the magazine. Announcement of the winning article will be made in *The Nation* in the fall of 1990.

**DEADLINE:** All entries must be postmarked by June 30, 1990.

**ENTRY RULES:**

All entries must have been written or published between September 1, 1989, and June 30, 1990. Tear sheets or photocopies are acceptable.

Each writer, editor of a student publication or faculty member may submit up to three separate entries. A series of related articles will be considered as a single entry. Investigative articles are particularly encouraged. There are no restrictions as to scope, content or length.

Accompanying material in support of entries is not required, but entrants are encouraged to submit a cover letter explaining the context of the submitted story, along with a brief biographical note about the author. Elaborate presentations are neither required nor desired. Entries will not be returned.

Judges reserve the right to authenticate, accept or disallow entries at their discretion. The decision of the judges is final.

All entries must include the writer's school, home address and telephone number.

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# BOOKS & THE ARTS.

## 'Let My People Know'

ARTHUR H. SAMUELSON

THE TALMUD: The Steinsaltz Edition. Volume I: Tractate Bava Metzia, Part I. *Commentary by Adin Steinsaltz. Translated and edited by Israel V. Berman. Random House. 252 pp. $40.*

THE TALMUD: The Steinsaltz Edition. A Reference Guide. *By Adin Steinsaltz. Random House. 323 pp. $40.*

*Rabbi Yehudah said: "If one translates a verse literally, he is a liar; if he adds to it, he is a blasphemer and a libeller."*
*—The Talmud (B. Kiddushin 49a)*

Adin Steinsaltz is an Israeli scholar, rabbi, scientist, mystic and social critic who has created an innovative edition of the Talmud designed to make that book more accessible to those curious to sample its riches. Sporting a button that says "Let My People Know," he has made it his personal mission to bring the Talmud back to the center of Jewish life (a position it occupied until the nineteenth century) by translating it into a language accessible to moderns, secular as well as religious. Studying the Talmud is important, Steinsaltz believes, because there is not a single Jewish community that has lost the Talmud and survived. Deeply religious himself, he would like all Jews to see that this is one book that has something for everyone. "According to the sages," he writes, "the Talmud was never completed: it . . . is being revealed through the generations, by every person engaged in it. Entering into it is participation in a spiritual adventure in which the Jew passes through the collective soul of his people, by which he reveals the biology of reality."

Born into a left-wing family, holding a degree in mathematics and chemistry as well as a rabbinic ordination, Steinsaltz has become a phenomenon in Israel because of his ability to speak to both religious and secular audiences, two cultures locked in a bitter struggle. Only a prodigiously gifted person could master both cultures, and only one of unusual courage, energy and gentleness could bridge them. Steinsaltz has won the respect and admiration of secularists who would quickly dismiss him were he a mere proselytizer or propagandist. He is popular with Israeli youth for his broadcasts for the army radio station on religious subjects (he narrowly escaped excommunication by one of the extreme religious groups for a program criticizing the patriarchs for their treatment of their wives), and he has published many books on Jewish belief and practice, some of which have been translated into English. In addition, he has taken an active role in bringing Jewish education to Soviet Jews, opening the first yeshiva in the Soviet Union since the Revolution as well as supervising the inventory and replication of the Soviet Union's vast archives of Hebrew manuscripts. He oversees two yeshivas, a school for Jewish art and a program to investigate science in the Talmud. He has been profiled by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, by *Newsweek* and *Time* and *People*. He has been at Yale University, at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, and at the Aspen Institute. Two years ago, he was awarded the Israel Prize, the country's highest civilian honor.

But it is for his translation of the Talmud into modern Hebrew that Steinsaltz is most likely to be remembered, though readers who don't know the Talmud may wonder why a Hebrew translation could be significant. In fact, the Talmud is written mostly in Aramaic, with some Hebrew words and phrases. Aramaic, once the language of virtually the entire ancient Near East, is written in Hebrew letters, with a grammar similar to that of Hebrew. As knowledge of Latin is useful to understand French, so knowledge of Hebrew is useful but not sufficient to understand Aramaic.

Although the Talmud is one of the great books of Western civilization, it is virtually inaccessible to all but the very few who choose to devote a lifetime to its study. Though once the most prized of Jewish possessions, it is now as foreign and incomprehensible to most Jews as it has always been to Christians. Burned as satanic by popes in the Middle Ages (though none could read it), it has been reduced in our vocabulary to a lowly adjective describing a certain kind of thinking—convoluted, hairsplitting, esoteric, Jewish. But as a noun, as a text, the Talmud is virtually unknown.

"Talmud" means study or learning. The Babylonian Talmud is a collection of texts containing 2.5 million words in 5,894 pages that are drawn from two sources, the Mishna and the Gemara. The Mishna, written in Hebrew, is a body of teachings by rabbis who lived under Roman rule in the Land of Israel—that is, Judea and the Galilee—between about 30 B.C. and 200 A.D. These teachings are derived from many generations of oral tradition and close readings of the Five Books of Moses. They establish by means of exquisite argument and debate a foundation of law and learning by which Jews could live with themselves and one another, with non-Jews and with their God. The Mishna consists of sixty-three tractates, or volumes, thematically divided into six orders devoted to agriculture, festivals, women, torts, the Temple service and ritual purity. The Gemara, written mostly in Aramaic and completed in the sixth century A.D., follows the order of the Mishna and records the close reading, explication and exegesis of the Mishna and the Bible from rabbinic discussions in the academies in Babylonia under the Persians and in the Land of Israel under the Romans. This is commentary on commentary on commentary. (There is also a Jerusalem Talmud that is shorter, less well organized and more difficult to understand, containing the Gemara of the rabbis who lived in Judea and the Galilee, the centers of Jewish life and learning after the Romans banished the Jews from Jerusalem.)

In both Aramaic and Hebrew, the vowels, which determine meaning, are placed underneath the consonants. But the traditional edition of the Talmud has no vowels—or for that matter, punctuation—and it is peppered with abbreviations. The first task of reading a page of the Talmud, therefore, is to figure out where sentences, paragraphs and quotations begin and end.

This makes reading the Talmud something like confronting a piece of Baroque music, where there is no direction as to how, or even on what instrument, the music is to be played. As with music, though, there is tradition. In the Talmud, tradition takes the form of commentaries made during the Middle Ages which are now an integral part of the text. They are printed in the margins on both sides

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of a Gemara text, which itself is printed in the center of the page. The design and density of this page, however, make for an additional problem of comprehension: It is often impossible to make head or tail of the text without using a finger. Sometimes it even helps to sing it! A favorite game of yeshiva students during Purim, a holiday which has the frivolity of April Fools' Day, involves reading the text so that what are generally considered to be statements become questions and vice versa. Technically speaking, if sense can be made this way, no one can say this is not how the text is meant to be read.

Christian polemicists eager to prove the uniqueness and superiority of Jesus' teachings have made the Talmud out to be a dry, spiritless, formalistic lawbook. It isn't. Virtually everything in the universe, or at least in the rabbinic universe, is fair game for discussion. Only roughly a third is devoted to rules of right living; the remainder comprises *aggadah*, parables, homilies, biblical exegesis, theological speculation and stories the rabbis tell one another. This is a book that has no beginning or end or immediately apparent order. Because the Talmud was studied through memorization before being written down, its underlying structure is mnemonic. Everything relates to everything else, and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Discussions suddenly diverted by the introduction of completely different and seemingly irrelevant issues end and then equally unexpectedly veer back to the original subject. Organic and associative, this is the logic of poetry, not mathematics or metaphysics; it is also the way the mind really works.

Indeed, the Talmud gives the impression of having been written with complete knowledge of itself all the time. Time is abolished as rabbis of the first and second centuries are addressed by rabbis of the third, fourth and fifth centuries who are in turn addressed by commentators from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. In reconstructing the way in which previous generations understood a question, the Mishna, the Gemara and the commentators extend it in new directions, thus providing work for those who come later.

At its best, learning the Talmud means learning how to think, a kind of gymnastics of the mind. Learning the Talmud also means learning again how to read, this time to engage a text actively and not passively absorb it. What does this word mean? What source is this from? If this statement is true, how can it be reconciled with this other statement? These are the questions that the Talmud asks itself and the commentators ask one another. Once the mind of the reader is brought to bear upon them, these rabbinic arguments become uncannily three-dimensional, like holograms from another universe.

Equally remarkable is the reverence given to study of the Talmud. One studies the Talmud to learn how to live, but Judaism elevates the process of study so that it is on a par with practice. The Talmud says about itself, "These are the things from which a person derives benefit in this world, while the reward is reserved for him in the World to Come: honoring one's father and mother, performing deeds of kindness, making peace between man and his fellow man. And the study of Torah is equal to all of them." This was understood by the rabbis to mean that study was a virtue in itself, one even higher than praxis. It was inconceivable to them that knowledge of God's law would not inevitably lead to practice. This helps explain the paradoxical requirement that successful applicants for membership on the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of the Jews during the Temple period, were required, among other criteria, to provide thirty-eight reasons why a lizard could be kosher even though everyone knew the Law said it wasn't.

The reverence for process turned Talmudic study into a social experience: Each passage is studied slowly, out loud, with a partner and in a group with a teacher. In the *bet ha midrash*, the Jewish library, talk is not only permitted but required. The story is told of a group of Orthodox Jewish students who took a course on the Talmud as part of their studies at Harvard Law School. At the end of the year they signed up to take it again, to the bewilderment of the registrar, who could not understand why they would want to repeat a course they had all passed. He did not understand that a book that has no beginning or end was not meant to be finished. Adin Steinsaltz writes:

> In its very essence, the Talmud is a paradox. . . . Seemingly it is a disorderly book written like a modern stream of consciousness novel, full of free association, sub-themes and elaborations—but it is also precise and fastidiously phrased, edited with extreme care, giving clear meanings to the order of sentences and to every word and synonym. The Talmud is ostensibly concerned with explaining the innumerable aspects of Jewish law, but in principle it does not attempt to reach binding legal conclusions; it strives rather, with limitless intellectual curiosity, to find satisfactory solutions to the problems of the how, why, and wherefore of every issue. . . . Strange as it seems, they devote their attention equally to serious practical questions and to far removed hypothetical problems. . . . There is no literary work of such intellectuality in which all questions are valid and even desirable, no other book that has tens of different words for various kinds of questions. At the same time, the Talmud is basically concerned with holiness; it is a book the study of which is itself a ritual act. In a word—a holy intellectualism.

But how can a nonreligious reader participate in this spirituality of study? Steinsaltz's great innovation was to provide tools to crack the Talmud's code. He vocalized and punctuated the Hebrew-Aramaic text, spelled out abbreviations and opened up the densely packed Talmud page so that it now contains only half as much text, making it much more inviting to a neophyte's eye. Preserving the traditional commentaries of Rashi and his grandsons, Steinsaltz adds material that is not found in the traditional Talmud but is very welcome to the modern reader: a translation into modern Hebrew of difficult words in the text; useful and interesting biological, astronomical, philological and biographical information to add appreciation to what is being discussed; and a digest of the major rabbinical commentators on problematic aspects of the text and the legal rulings that have derived from them.

This ambitious translation project, begun in 1967, has so far produced twenty-one of a projected forty volumes. While the ultra-Orthodox, who are phobic about change on principle, were unlikely to applaud the translation (they did not condemn it outright either), Israeli state-run religious schools, much more moderate, have not adopted it as a substitute for the traditional Talmud because of the fear it might become a "crutch." Nonetheless, some 1 million copies are said to have been sold, indicating that many have been purchased by religious students who hide it at home. If Steinsaltz, who is only 52 but suffers from a chronic disease, lives long enough to complete his translation, many people believe he will have made one of the most important Israeli

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contributions to Jewish culture since the founding of the state.

Whatever the final impact of the Steinsaltz Talmud on Israeli culture, the fact is that today a major part of the Jewish people speak English as a native tongue. Steinsaltz's goal of giving the Jews back their Talmud may be realistic in Israel, where the secular and religious share a common language in modern Hebrew and care enough about each other to engage in hand-to-hand combat. In America, however, only the Orthodox have the language skills necessary to open a volume of the Talmud, and they are apathetic toward the rest of the Jewish community and vice versa. Is it possible to translate a text as complex and quirky as the Talmud? Given the Talmud's preoccupation with language, can it be made accessible to people who do not know Hebrew? Can a translation reproduce the experience of study, of entering into a conversation across time and space?

Steinsaltz has now brought his Talmud to America. Random House recently published the first volume of what is called an English-language translation of his Israeli Talmud, with a reference guide to the entire Talmud. They are very handsomely and expensively produced, perhaps excessively so, with gilt-edged paper, foil-stamped jacket, even a gold-ribbon place marker, just like a Holy Book. Traditional Talmuds are much more modest affairs, usually photo-offset from nineteenth-century editions, cheap and without any frills. They are not purchased because they look holy; they become holy through study. You wouldn't worry about spilling anything hot on one of them during a long night of study, but you would probably want to remove the Random House edition from your coffee table before serving guests.

I am not sure why Random House has chosen to call this *The Talmud: The Steinsaltz Edition*. The Israeli edition is called *The Babylonian Talmud*, which is its correct name, and Steinsaltz's name appears at the bottom in small print as translator, commentator and punctuator. Moreover, this is not a translation of the Israeli translation, despite what it says on the copyright page, but an entirely new work, the product of a team of translators under the direction of Rabbi Israel Berman, who worked from the original Talmud.

The inaugural volume consists of the first chapter of *Bava Metzia* (The Middle Gate), of the order of *Nezikin*, or torts (for some reason it is identified on the jacket as Part I). It begins with the famous line, "Two are holding on to a garment. This one says, 'I found it,' and this one says, 'I found it.' This one says: 'All of it is mine,' and this one says: 'All of it is mine.' " Soon the text and commentaries have us wondering what are the ethical and legal rights and responsibilities of ownership as they relate not just to finders of lost objects but also to the loading and unloading of goods, to delayed payment of wages and to the inviolability of deposits. We are taught what constitutes fraud, why charging interest is wrong, why workers should be allowed to eat from the produce they are picking. We look at lost promissory notes, mortgages, bills of divorce and marriage contracts. Along the way we are asked to conjure up in our minds lions sitting in fields to prevent the poor from gleaning; purses flying in one window of a room and out the other; rabbis on ships giving away their property; and camels and donkeys being driven or led.

All of this may be bewildering to someone approaching the Talmud for the first time, but there is help. First, there is the accompanying reference guide, which can be of use to anyone studying the Talmud, whether in the original or in translation.


# A Celebration of Work

By Norman Best
Edited, with an introduction, by William G. Robbins

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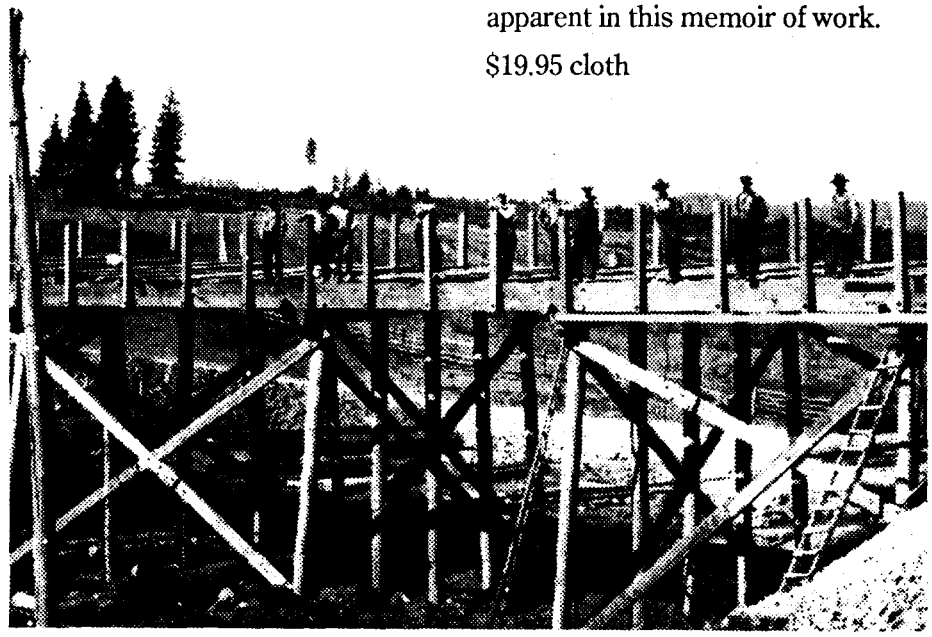

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The reference guide gives an introduction to the political and religious circumstances that produced the Talmud, and an explanation of the assumptions and purpose that underlie the debates contained within it. There is a guide to the rabbis mentioned in the Talmud, to where and when they lived and to the commentators who came after them. Also included are a short Aramaic dictionary and grammar, a glossary of Talmudic phrases and abbreviations, appendices of Talmudic weights and measures and a general index.

In addition, because the goal of this translation is to make the Talmud more accessible to readers less at home with Jewish culture in general, the translators have gone far beyond Steinsaltz's approach in the Israeli edition. They have simplified the text. The original Talmud, vocalized and punctuated, is placed untranslated in the center of the page, and on each side, where the commentaries used to be, there are now two translations of the text: one literal and hard to follow, and the other easier to understand because it includes a running commentary that tells the reader exactly what is going on and why. At the foot of the page and in the margins there is an expanded version of the supplementary notes that appear in the Israeli edition.

But, as the Talmud itself would say, *Kashya* ("There is a problem"). With all these additions, there is not much room for the actual Talmud. In a 252-page book the translators have found room for only the first chapter of *Bava Metzia*, twenty-one pages of the actual Talmud. By comparison, the Israeli version contains five of *Bava Metzia*'s ten chapters in one volume. This is because Hebrew, like Aramaic, is extremely laconic and there is much less to explain. (Random House has not yet announced whether it intends to publish the entire Steinsaltz Talmud, but if this ratio holds up, they will have to publish 200 volumes, making this not only the most expensive Talmud but the longest.)

A more important problem: There is now no room for the commentators. Those voices from the past who guide us through the Talmud's depths have been banished from the page (except for Rashi, whose commentary is inexplicably preserved in its characteristically idiosyncratic Hebrew script). Steinsaltz justifies this by saying that they are no longer necessary because their ideas about how to read a text are now inside the translation; they are gone but not forgotten. When it comes to the Talmud, translation is commentary and commentary is translation.

One of the translators, Jeffrey Green, explains how this works. "The translators went far beyond the province of mere translation," he writes in a December 1989 article in *Midstream*:

> They argued against Rabbi Steinsaltz's commentary when they disagreed with it, adducing sources of all kinds to justify their position, and providing their own interpretations. Occasionally they departed so far from the original text that Baruch [Goldberg, Steinsaltz's aide-de-camp] had me go back and make a cogent literal translation of it. Then I left it to him and Israel [Berman] to sort out who was right. In any event, these learned translators enriched the commentary through their work, so in some respects, though Rabbi Steinsaltz might not be pleased to hear it, the English edition may be somewhat better than the Hebrew.

An unusual boast from a translator! What Green is saying is that the Steinsaltz edition is not really a Talmud, but a reading of it, predigested. Only some of the commentators' ideas have made it into the text; and they have made it in only in the ways in which the translators have decided to let them. Subsuming the commentaries in the translation means that all the work that normally goes into comprehending a text of the Talmud has been done by someone else. The Talmud becomes a book to be read, not one to be engaged through study. Gone are the holographic images conjured up by wrestling with a difficult passage. Gone is the participation across time and space. And gone is the fun.

In making the Talmud overly accommodating to strangers, the translators have paradoxically betrayed its essence. Reading the Steinsaltz Talmud in English is like trying to understand what a crossword puzzle is when the words have been filled in. You get the idea but you miss the point: Process is everything.

Steinsaltz certainly knows the difference between studying and reading the Talmud. Why did he choose to translate his Talmud this way? The Israeli version, after all, does not eliminate the commentators; it does not magnify his contribution while diminishing the Talmud. He did it, I believe, because there is no way for an English-speaking reader to experience the Talmud. The best even Steinsaltz can offer is a reproduction of someone else's experience.

Studying the Talmud in its original languages is itself an act of translation. The rabbis who composed the Talmud

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and the rabbis who teach us how to read it all had to navigate between at least two languages: their own and biblical Hebrew. They all had different mother tongues, but they were all acutely aware of the nuances and subtleties of Hebrew, the language of the Bible, foundation stone of the Talmud's concern. Their attention is focused on stretching this language in new ways, taking it to places no other language can go. They play with its grammar, move vowels around, turn biblical verses upside down and inside out, make puns. Moreover, they can comprehend and express in Hebrew and Aramaic uniquely Jewish concepts that cannot be translated easily into other languages heavily influenced by Christianity. Steinsaltz did not translate the commentators, because without access to Hebrew, they make no sense.

One could say, therefore, that in failing to allow the English-speaking reader to experience the Talmud, Steinsaltz's translation paradoxically reveals something very profound about that experience. And since that is what he set out to do, in defeat there is success.

Now that is Talmudic reasoning!

I have been studying the Talmud in a class with a teacher since September. I had tried to persuade my friend the psychiatrist to join me, because I know he is deeply interested in Judaism. He feared that he did not have enough Hebrew, and so he declined. When the Steinsaltz came out in English, however, my friend rushed to buy it because he had always wanted to own a Talmud. I explained to him why I believed it was not possible to study the Talmud in English or alone without a teacher or class. "We will see," he said.

Several months later I ran into my friend. "You were wrong," he glowed triumphantly. "Talmud is not that hard for me to follow. I am already on page ninety-three."

"That's funny," I said. "I am only up to page four." □

# The Real State of the Union

JOHN SALVATI

THE PRESENT AGE: Progress and Anarchy in Modern America. *By Robert Nisbet. Harper & Row. 145 pp. Paper $7.95.*

BARBARIAN SENTIMENTS: How the American Century Ends. *By William Pfaff. Hill and Wang. 198 pp. $19.95.*

Sociologist Robert Nisbet and political analyst William Pfaff have written a pair of idiosyncratic meditations—from far right and near left, respectively—on the moral, intellectual and political disarray that characterize present-day America. While at first glance *The Present Age* and *Barbarian Sentiments* differ sharply, they turn out to be similar in unexpected ways. From Pfaff we get a bracing sense of how we look to some of our fellow travelers, particularly the Europeans; from Nisbet, of how we would look to the Founders if only they could see us now.

Nisbet thinks the Founders would be appalled, particularly by three phenomena that were noticeably absent from the America of their intentions: the enormous military and the concomitant militarization of the economy and the universities, the bloated federal bureaucracy and the widespread proliferation of "loose individuals," the fast-buck artists who are paradigms of a deeper social dissolution. In Nisbet's view, the beginning of the end goes back to World War I. The major break with traditional America—an isolated land of small towns and dowdy cities, bourgeois, puritan, relatively homogeneous, held together by cultural glue imported from Britain—occurred when the Great War thrust for the first time into national life an elaborate, federally managed military state. The Great War also spawned "the Great American Myth"—always capitalized—also known as "Can Do, Know How, and No Fault."

Fertilized by Wilsonian moral fervor, the Myth thrived. It is now flourishing at every level of the national consciousness, a potent intoxicant that can always be counted on to let loose a flood of jingoistic fantasy. The Myth has convinced many Americans that we are a warrior race despite an incontrovertible historical record that shows that, from Yorktown to Beirut, we "have not been good at war, and particularly conventional war fought on land." In Detroit the Myth purred as smoothly as today's foreign-built engines, causing everyone from C.E.O. on down to smile complacently at the "vast litter of unsafe, low quality, ugly, and expensive automobiles [which] were the issue of the Know How, Can Do, and No Fault psychology of the auto industry." It is hard to imagine what, aside from the Myth, stands behind "our towering national debt of close to three trillions [the largest debtor nation in history, we now spend close to $200 billion a year in interest], our annual budget deficits . . . and our even more hazardous trade deficits." Meanwhile, American politicians across the board seem increasingly willing to say anything that plays to the crowd, no matter how stupid, destructive or remote from reality. "Government by deception, by flat lying," writes Nisbet, "grows apace in America."

Finally, Nisbet turns to our "loose individuals," after junk bonds the greatest creation of the 1980s, and their baleful influence on American society. His loose individuals are not quite the same thing as the anomic hordes drifting so listlessly and forgettably through much contemporary American fiction, where life unfolds, or mostly doesn't, between the television set and the shopping mall. What Nisbet has in mind are the folk heroes of our time, the Milkens and Icahns and Trumps, and their admirers. He calls these people the product of multiple breakdowns within the structures of family, class constraints and "craft fraternities." They emerged in droves as soon as Reagan settled into the Oval Office.

Using Joseph Schumpeter's distinction between the "hard" property of yore (land, buildings, machines) and the "soft" property of today (stocks, bonds), Nisbet maintains that property owners have lost their sense of possessing a stake in society, that crucial "role of social responsibility based upon day-to-day mingling with managers, workers, and consumers." And despite the "pretentious and sometimes duplicitous assurances of the raiders" themselves, there is no hard evidence that leveraged buyouts and the like are helping the economy. Nisbet likens them to a rearranging of the deck chairs on the Titanic.

The society Nisbet describes is almost entirely lacking of any "organic connection"; he thinks the "American Idyll" is over. But he remains an American pessimist, which is to say an optimist at heart:

> The problems or conditions which have persisted throughout the present age—militarism, bureaucracy, the monetarization of the human spirit, and the trivialization of culture—are all subject to arrest and reversal.

Reversing such a precipitate decline, he argues, would take a full-blown "revolution of ideas"—which, given his Burkean

*John Salvati, a writer living in New York City, is finishing a novel.*

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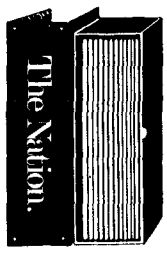


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sentiments, described eloquently in his *Conservatism* and *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary*, would presumably involve redeploying some long-lost ideals. But Nisbet does not discuss whether such ideals, which worked for a sparsely populated nation—a country that was an annex of Europe—would stand a chance in the very different America that has been developing for the past three decades. (It's estimated that in roughly sixty years the majority of our people will be of non-European descent.) By turning America's attention back on itself, the end of the cold war will only accelerate these changes—an idea explored provocatively by Pfaff. On the other hand, Nisbet admits that there is at least an even chance we are not going to see any "revolution of ideas."

Because the greatly underrated William Pfaff (this is his fifth book, including three co-written with the late Edmund Stillman) tries to give a global answer to the question of how the American century ends, *Barbarian Sentiments* casts a much wider net than *The Present Age*. Pfaff takes a close look at the political tensions and unrealized ambitions in all the major centers of power and relates them, iconoclastically and often brilliantly, to America's own internal tensions and unfulfilled strivings. (Written before the recent upheavals in Europe, the book has already proved itself to be strikingly prescient.)

Pfaff sees a ship of state—and the society it represents—foundering. He sees an American political culture animated by "dead stars"—a litany of "exhausted ideas" every bit as insidious as Can Do, Know How, and No Fault. Americans, he says, are "unwilling to admit that the United States is not a unique nation."

> The political rhetoric of the United States has continued to employ the old vocabulary of American exceptionalism, national mission, American preeminence. Yet there is no longer an intellectually responsible ruling idea of Americanism, a fully acceptable formulation of this justificatory national purpose—to say nothing of a national policy to advance it.

That "fully acceptable formulation" disappeared with its principal authors and spokesmen: the old "national political elite which dominated public affairs . . . as late as the Second World War." This group was, of course, largely Protestant, puritan and of British descent—what Joseph Alsop called the "WASP ascendancy." For centuries, theirs was the central moral and civic identity; this was their country. They ran the economy, nominated the government from their ranks and propagated themselves through a small group of elite secondary schools and universities. As Alsop said, their "family houses" even smelled the same. Pfaff glosses over the commendable fact that what the ascendancy lost, American minorities, to a large extent anyway, gained. Political power was disseminated on a scale that is rare in history. However, Pfaff makes the important and often ignored point that, in the process, something vital was needlessly lost. We are now discovering, for the first time in our history, "what it is to be a society without a recognizable governing class, and thus without that consensus on political values which is implicit in the existence of such a class."

In response to this void, Pfaff suggests, arose the neoconservatives, who have as a main task, according to Irving Kristol, "to explain to the American people why they are right, and to the intellectuals why they are wrong." Pfaff writes:

> In successive elections in the late 1970s and the 1980s, Americans elected or re-elected Presidents whose principal, even sole, qualification for that office was their ability to make Americans feel better about themselves and their country. There was a competition in reassurances to Americans, first that the country was still a "good" country, and then that it was strong, its future bright, its leadership intact. This very insistence suggested, however, that doubt about these things persisted, and not just among an alienated element of a liberal intelligentsia.

To a certain extent, the old elite functioned in America the way aristocracies did in Europe: They set cultural and personal standards. The pseudo-elite that followed on their heels did not share those standards, and as a result the market took over with a vengeance. Along with Nisbet, Pfaff decries the sovereignty of market values and the willingness, indeed eagerness, of Americans to allow those values to govern artistic, intellectual and political life. This abdication, says Pfaff, is as fatalistic and gruesome as racism; in the end, it may prove even more destructive.

The American Empire is ending, as short-lived as they come. Pfaff argues that, to our credit, it was always "a fleeting empire, forced upon us in

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emergency . . . an unserious empire, of unexamined ideas and uncalculated ambitions." Nevertheless, we continue to export the American way of life in an attempt to remake the world in our own image, even though all but the most fanatical merchants can see that the product has not, does not, and cannot travel well. We manage to ignore this because the United States is still driven by old ideas that continue to define the country as the model for mankind. Even so, Pfaff says:

> It is clear now that the internationalism of the last quarter century was simply a transmogrified nationalism, and no true passion to rule spice kingdoms or dominate the exotic. We wanted power, but we also wanted people to concede us that power by right; we laid a claim upon the century as ours, but as a function of our altruism and the universality of our values. Denied that, our will to empire was broken. . . . We could never accept others dispassionately for what they are, because that would have implied an equally dispassionate judgment upon what we are.

And what are we? For decades Americans have been defining themselves in terms of the moral worth that accrued by virtue of the nation's efforts in World War II, the largesse of the Marshall Plan and other postwar aid programs. Or, negatively if not schizophrenically, we have defined ourselves in contrast with the Evil Empire. As long as the cold war raged, we had a convenient excuse to forgo self-scrutiny and avoid dealing with what Pfaff calls "our inner distress, our national uncertainty—our unrealized national purpose." The cold war was a claim to continued innocence. We are due to take a long hard look at ourselves—specifically at "the legacy of the worst things in our past, slavery and the casual decimation of American Indian society, [both of which are] still unresolved." It is not going to be easy.

Meanwhile, the world has started to remake itself not in our image but in terms of powerful and ancient national impulses (the intensifying dynamism of Europe is the most important example of this) while our domestic political life is permeated by a sense of drift and escapism. As Elizabeth Drew has put it, there no longer seems to be any willingness in Congress or the White House to be responsible—or even to face hard questions. Debt is being recklessly piled up for future generations, education is a disaster, inner cities are rotting. And, as Pfaff nicely expresses it, echoing Nisbet, "the discrepancy between language employed and what actually is thought (not to speak of what is done) approaches scandal."

> The day the United States renounced World Court jurisdiction over its conduct in Central America, President Reagan proclaimed "Law Day," saying that "without law, there can be no freedom, only chaos and disorder."

Bush is proving himself to be a master at this sinister game.

Yet, like Nisbet, Pfaff sees a way out. Essentially, they see the same way out: The country can "revert to its natural condition, which is isolationism."

> Isolationism could be good for the country. The United States might find itself again; resources exist for reconstruction. . . . But does the will exist? Is there a willingness to be serious, to make sacrifices again, to take our indulgences in hand? . . . The frontier that remains is the interior one, the most forbidding and mysterious frontier.

Without doubt, exploring that frontier would be traumatic. But, as Pfaff makes clear, the alternative would be worse. □

# Past Present

## TIMOTHY FERRIS

Seventeen years ago a friend did me a favor I shall never forget, by presenting me with a copy of R.H. Blyth's *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*, published by Hokuseido Press (no longer available in a U.S. edition). Actually, she dropped off a whole box of books, and worthy books they were, but when I picked up the Blyth and started reading it I *kept* reading it, to the exclusion of all else. Then I went out and got his other books—the five-volume *Zen and Zen Classics*, the four-volume *Haiku* (one volume for each season), the two-volume *A History of Haiku*—and read them, too, and have been reading them ever since. Seldom have I encountered books that were so much fun, and that made so much sense.

Some authors are overlooked because their subject is overlooked. The opposite, I suspect, is more nearly the case with Blyth. So many books have been published in English about Zen, and about its relationship to literature and art and finance and sex and self-esteem, that Blyth's works have to some extent been buried, like the first-fallen leaves of autumn. But Blyth's sensibility has little to do with New Age yearnings for self-improvement or nonchallenging enlightenment, or with romantic idealizations of the exotic East or, for that matter, with the notion that Zen Buddhism is nice or sweet or friendly. His books are vinegar among these seductive perfumes. Where they are vague, he is specific; where they are obscurantist, he is clear. Wry, ironic, commonsensical, pessimistic and rigorously nonmetaphysical, Blyth eschews all pieties, including those that tend to elevate one's esteem for Zen itself. Blyth writes that

> Zen is the essence of Christianity, of Buddhism, of culture, of all that is good in the daily life of ordinary people. But that does not mean that we are not to smash it flat if we get the slightest opportunity.

Impatient with the love of the mystical that enchants priests and poetasters, Blyth insisted that Zen is a wholly human invention, as useful and unpretentious as a hoe. "Comparisons are odious," he writes, "but odiousness is one of the qualities—almost the chief quality—of the universe. Zen means not choosing, not praising or blaming, not liking or loathing—so they say. But real Zen means choosing, praising, blaming, liking, loathing—humorously." Nor did he ever fall victim to that fatal weakness of so many devotees of Zen and its antecedent, the myth of the supernatural:

> Levitation was pretty common in Kyozan's life. He shows no surprise at it. Most of such bird-men seem to have come from India. Hot air rises.

Though Blyth was a great teacher, he was sharply skeptical of the very act of teaching. "All teaching," he wrote—in words that ought to be engraved over the entrance of every school—"must be more or less malicious."

About the life of Reginald Blyth I know little, except that he was English, was living in Japan when the war broke

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out, was incarcerated as a prisoner of war and later taught in Japanese universities, and died in 1964. He was extraordinarily well read (as well read as, say, Borges), wore his learning lightly and was a respected translator of haiku. Having learned from Blyth's books for years, I should like, as one writer to another, to pay him two specific compliments—though he would have said that was two too many.

The first is that he had an eye for a good story. He could recount an anecdote with a skill equal to that of the American Zen master Groucho Marx. Here is Blyth debunking sentiment:

> Nansen was asked by a monk, "Where will the master be gone to in a hundred years' time?" Nansen said, "I'll be a water-colored ox." The monk said, "May I follow you, or not?" Nansen said, "Well, if you do, bring a mouthful of grass with you."

Offering advice:

> I was once riding with Mr. Warner, who saved Kyoto from bombing. He said he was thinking of becoming a Roman Catholic. I said to him, "Mr. Warner, don't believe in anything which you have to defend."

Recounting the death of Fuke, "the most eccentric of all the Zen monks":

> Stretching out his hand [Fuke said], "Give me some money!"

My second comment is that Blyth ranks with Einstein as one of the freest men who ever lived. In a brief autobiographical essay, written in 1948 for a student newspaper, he permitted himself a brief expression of his sense of liberty:

> The aim of life, its only aim, is to be free. Free of what? Free to do what? Only to be free, that is all. Free through ourselves, free to be sad, to be in pain; free to grow old and die. That is what our soul desires, and this freedom it must have; and shall have.

If the many worlds that we live in today are, as we may optimistically suppose, destined to merge into something more like one world, this unification will come about, I suspect, not so much because computers or communications or finance draw the various cultures together but because each comes to see that the others have something of inestimable value to offer. What Blyth has done (and not that this is by any means *all* that he has done) is to show us a slice of what Japanese thought has to offer us—not cars or TV sets but the earned wisdom of the human condition:

> The more we suffer, intelligently, the deeper our life. Buddha said that life is suffering, and taught us how to avoid both. This was wrong. Deep suffering is deep life. . . . Nirvana is often taken as a condition of supreme joy. But it is also that of supreme sadness. The point anyway is not the joy or sadness, but the supremeness. □

# THEATER.

## THOMAS M. DISCH

### The Grapes of Wrath
### By and for Havel

*Of Mice and Men* may be a more enduring work of art in Steinbeck's own stage adaptation than as a novel, and the same may be true of the adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath* done by Frank Galati. Certainly this *Grapes*, in the production of Chicago's Steppenwolf Theater Company that has finally reached Broadway after scoring successes at the La Jolla Playhouse and London's National Theatre, registers as an instant classic, much as a Madonna and Child fresh off Raphael's easel might. Galati's blocking creates a succession of tableaux that achieve just that balance between formal beauty and true grit that yields a sense of the Ideal. Galati has pared down the text to the dialogic equivalent, so that Steinbeck's Okies seem to talk with a Dantean concision and pithiness. The scenery and lighting by Kevin Rigdon provide a milieu of exquisitely varied and lovely desolations, with the bright blues and ambers of Thomas Hart Benton's paintings. The production affords just those opulences of stage magic—cooking fires, swimming holes, a rainstorm, a burial with real dirt—that sort with the play's affirmation of what is elemental and noble in human nature in even the direst of circumstances. (By comparison, the ponderous stage machineries of *Les Misérables* go down like a Trump casino charity benefit for the homeless.)

Steppenwolf has been noted for the uncommon number of actors who graduate from its stages to Broadway and Hollywood stardom, and so the quality of the ensemble's acting is predictably excellent. It should be noted, however, that two-thirds of the thirty-five-person cast are not members of the company, and this includes five or six of the key roles. With so many to praise I will limit myself to three: Gary Sinise, as Tom Joad, seems bound for glory, being possessed of that edge of intensity that allows someone of fashion-model good looks to register, even so, as an actor. Lois Smith, as Ma Joad, has to compete with our memories of Jane Darwell in the movie; where Darwell was all strength and salt-of-the-earth, Smith infuses the role with a quiet tragic horror. Jeff Perry as the simple-minded Noah has one great scene of lyric despair in Act I that affected me more than anything else in the play.

Indeed, I must confess that as much as I admired every aspect of the production, I left the theater without the glow or tremble that the events depicted onstage might be thought to have warranted. It may be that I am too familiar with the movie. In Act I, Galati has mined dialogue and whole scenes from the novel that are not to be found in John Ford's film, and the effect is that of a continuous fresh breeze wafting in from the text. But in Act II there are fewer divergences. When it came time for Gary Sinise to deliver his last Wherever-there-is-suffering-in-the-world-I'll-be-there set piece, it was Henry Fonda I heard, not Sinise.

What I did feel at the final tableau, as Rose of Sharon nurses a starving black man, was reverence and edification, such as might attend the conclusion of a church service. Steinbeck's is an idealizing art. It presents figures that are at once noble and representative against a background (moral as well as physical) of luminous simplicity. It is the kind of art that dictators hope for when they commission their own portraits, and often enough a habit of careless cynicism will confuse the genuine article with such portraits. I had a memorable argument once with a friend who could not abide a Raphael Madonna and Child in the Louvre. To her it registered as insipid rather than inspired. To me Raphael's ambition—to create figures of archetypal beauty, images of the essentially human—seems hard to improve on. That was Steinbeck's lifelong ambition, and one that he has realized once again, posthumously, in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

It seems inevitable, now that he has become one of the Ten Most Interesting People in the World, that the plays of Vaclav Havel will become, even more than they have been, a staple of regional and Off Broadway theaters. Of the four Havel plays presented by Joseph Papp at the Public Theater (*The Memorandum* in 1968; *A Private View* in 1983; *Largo*

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*Desolato* in 1986; and *Temptation* in 1989), I've seen only the last, and didn't much like it. But I'm happy to say that I thoroughly enjoyed *Audience*, his half of *By and for Havel* at the John Houseman Studio Theatre on 42nd Street, and the prospect of seeing the Czechoslovak President's entire oeuvre now seems much more appealing.

Vanek, the hero of *Audience*, is a man much like Havel, a writer in a police state sentenced for crimes of the pen to work in a brewery. He is summoned to the office of the Brewmaster, who tries to bully and cajole him into taking over the job of informing on himself to the secret police. As played by Kevin O'Connor, the Brewmaster is a figure of heroic loutishness as he drinks himself toward a moment of truth in which he emerges as the true tragic victim in the situation. Much of that action consists of O'Connor uncapping and guzzling bottle after bottle of what foams and smells just like beer, until most of a large case has been consumed. The actor actually consumes, by his own count, the equivalent of eight or nine bottles of nonalcoholic beer in the hour the play runs. It seems like twenty, and it is an awful thing to witness. This is undoubtedly a trivial matter of note compared with what might be said of the author's larger philosophic and moral meanings, but it is great *theater*. One marvels at it, and one's marveling is all the while laying the ground for the slam-bang ending. In short, Havel is a good playwright, not just the most remarkable political dissident since Gandhi.

Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe* represents the *for* in *By and for Havel*, having been written in 1981 as a tribute to Havel, who was then in prison for founding Charter 77. It is not prime Beckett, and Vasek Simek, who directed the Havel play with straightforward vigor, exaggerates the Beckett play's flaws by s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g out every action and making the actors deliver their lines with hieratic, avant-garde portentousness. Lou Brockway, who'd been droll as Vanek, plays a symbolic victim in *Catastrophe* who is being dressed and posed, mannequinlike, at the behest of a cruel Director, played by O'Connor. At the end, as an homage to Havel's real-life triumph, Simek has the stooped-over and abused Brockway straighten up and stand proud to the strains of the Czechoslovak national anthem. This has caused some purists to protest at the liberty taken with Beckett's text—and with the subtext and credo of avant-garde orthodoxy: that there are no happy endings. None, ever. When history provides one, they can only protest that the text has been tampered with. □

# FILM NOTE.

## STUART KLAWANS

### H-2 Worker

Although the most shocking film I've seen in the past month has been *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*—on which I will reserve comment—the most horrific was Stephanie Black's new film, a documentary about the Jamaican guestworkers who harvest sugar cane in Florida each year. About 10,000 of these men are shipped into this country to live in barracks resembling prison camps and labor for a little over $1 an hour. The horror is that this is the best work they can find. The horror is that most Americans would prefer for these men to be invisible. In *H-2 Worker*, Black and her crew have undertaken the hard task of charming and wheedling their way into the work camps—sneaking in, too, when all else failed—in order to bring these people to light. The film—co-winner of the prize for best documentary at this year's Sundance United States Film Festival—was recently shown in the New Directors/New Films series. It will be on view again on April 18 in the Documentary Festival of New York at the Public Theater.

With admirable fluency, Black combines straightforward information and analysis with more evocative glimpses of the workers' lives. There are on-camera interviews with the workers (who spoke to Black at some risk); views of the barracks and fields; voice-over readings of letters to and from the workers' families. For political perspective, Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley explains the basics of imperialism and monoculture economies. For comic relief, a spokesman for the Florida Sugar Cane League assures us that everything is just fine. As a lesson in history, Black includes archival footage from the late 1930s or early 1940s, when the cane was harvested by migrant workers from the American South. The harvest is "a social occasion" for black people, the newsreel narrator declares while the workers grimly go about their business. Each year, after cotton season, these African-Americans respond to "the hereditary urge to return to the plantation."

The filmmakers have located one of these old-time workers, a man who now ekes out a living by collecting empty cans. He recalls the scandal of 1942, when the workers managed to bring attention to conditions on their "plantation." The result was an indictment for peonage against the U.S. Sugar Corporation. The company responded by refusing to hire any more Americans and got its harvesters thereafter from the West Indies, where workers would be too desperate and powerless to complain. Nothing much has changed since then, except that a new immigration law has expanded the H-2 program, so that corporations in other areas of agriculture may also use desperate, powerless workers. The supply seems unlimited. During the period when Black shot her film, more than 350 harvesters went on strike to protest their wages and were sent straight back to Jamaica. The sugar company replaced them within a week.

Much of the credit for *H-2 Worker* belongs to Black's collaborators. John Mullen, a veteran editor, made the elaborate montage work smoothly. Maryse Alberti was the cinematographer, sometimes working clandestinely. It seems almost callous to mention it under the circumstances, but her images are often beautiful. Twilight shots of workers leaving the field, seen against a high horizon, have the dignity and strength of the better Barbizon School paintings. But then, like the better Barbizon School artists, Black and her collaborators have an unsentimental conviction that these workers are fully human, that they experience not just anger and suffering but also love and pleasure—and even hope.

The good people at Third World Newsreel have organized a touring program titled Internal Exile, featuring dissident works made in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship. Six films will be on view in New York at the Museum of Modern Art, May 4-7. A selection of videos will be shown at Exit Art, May 11-12. Internal Exile will also be shown this year in Berkeley, California; Boston; Ithaca, New York; Philadelphia; Los Angeles; Minneapolis; Washington, D.C.; and Columbus, Ohio. □

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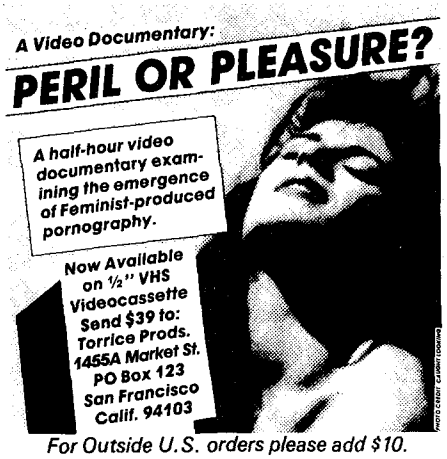


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SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2286

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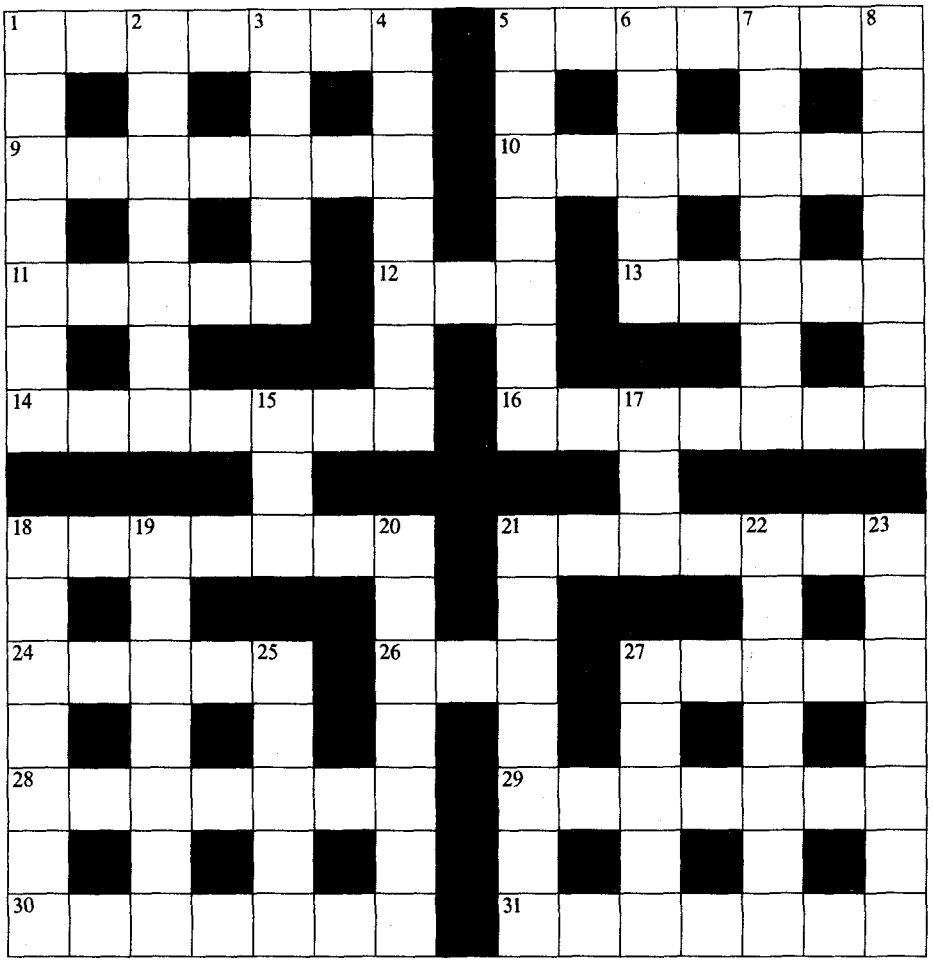
# Crossword Puzzle No. 2287

FRANK W. LEWIS



### ACROSS

1 and 5 First class railroad help with fighting groups of young scouts to control things during the blackout. (3,4,7)
9 Rye the literary location of part of the battery? (7)
10 One supposedly worthy of his hire comes back in actual fact about to steal. (7)
12 and 11 Cuts short, in the case of mongrels, the last things you'd expect. (7)
13 and 27 across An increasingly illegal business to raid very badly. (5,5)
14 Little ones swim in rings, by the sound of it. (7)
16 Find me in due course of change, but you may take something away from it. (7)
18 See 15 down
21 Take them for applause when you're anything but cool, or very much so—but Robin Hood would be less dangerous out of it. (7)
24 Robert at bat might suddenly do so. (3,2)
26 See 3 down
27 See 13
28 In Italy, a three drink competitor of course. (7)
29 No car in America can show a "plaything" like this! (7)
30 One who has been told to cease legally does this, too. (7)
31 Stoops to take in a point, and schemes to make patterns. (7)

### DOWN

1 One can carry self-denial to extremes! (7)
2 What might a dog be doing, catching something this way? That would be telling! (7)
3, 26 across and 25 In a pinch, a sedan's built for such bodily discomfort. (5,3,5)
4 Mistakenly credits what the bandmaster does. (7)
5 Predator and possibly prey—produced by tungsten. (7)
6 and 27 down The result of a religious man crying for something to pick up the signal? (6-4)
7 An English nobleman has the Order of the British Empire with pearls attached to it, perhaps. (7)
8 In the yard, set loose, wandered around. (7)
15 and 18 across They might offer some surprises, not only at wake-up time. (3-7)
17 and 21 down Not the same old sleeping place at the river crossing in Massachusetts. (3,7)
18 Perhaps rode around a bit, or went around the world. (7)
19 Identifying 31. (7)
20 Falls, perhaps, like salt and pepper. (7)
21 See 17
22 Taking certain direction for what's put on the page first, perhaps. (7)
23 These old people make up the outlaws, evidently. (7)
25 See 3 down
27 See 6 down

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT

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